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The Nature of Turkish Authoritarianism; 1930-1945

Cihan Çelik

Thesis submitted for the degree of PhD in History

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Department of History
School of Oriental and African Studies
University of London

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Thesis Abstract

This dissertation is a thematic analysis of the single-party years of the Turkish Republic. Turkey was a single-party state between 1925 and 1945 which was ruled by the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – RPP). The “eternal chief” of the party, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk also served as a strong President accountable to none until his death in 1938. From that point on, İsmet İnönü, a close associate and long-time Prime Minister of Atatürk held these positions. RPP and its chiefs promoted the notion of a strong, secular, modern and independent nation-state, with a monolithic, cohesive, national society undivided by classes or diverse senses of belongingness.

This research starts out from the presupposition that the single-party era Turkey was an authoritarian regime which shared many similarities with its contemporary authoritarian European states. These similarities such as the limitations on political and social pluralism, the utilization of personal charisma as a form of government, the building of a political religion by sacralisation of the ruling entity, and totalitarian traits of the regime will constitute the central themes which the thesis is focused on. For the examination of these themes, primary sources from the Prime Ministerial Archives were frequently used along a large selection of secondary sources.

The dissertation starts with an introduction which summarizes the main arguments of the thesis. This chapter is followed by an historical analysis of the period of 1930-1945 and includes a literature review which shows how different historians and social scientists dealt with the Turkish authoritarianism. Following chapters do focus on the newly-emerged consensus on fascism and Turkish authoritarianism's connection with it, the concept of political religion and Turkish authoritarianism's connection with it, and the clash between the non-modern and modern as the central conflict which steered the actions of the Turkish single-party regime.

This dissertation proposes that the Turkish single-party rule can be strongly considered as a candidate to be classified as a semi-fascist regime with totalitarian tendencies which aimed for the total transformation of the society by creating a new, modern, ‘ideal’ national community through cleansing it from unwanted elements by assimilation or exclusion, tried to build a political religion on sacralised entities such

as the party and its leaders and positioned the dichotomy between the non-modern, Islamicate “past” and modern, western “now” in its core.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A-RMHC Defence of Rights Group of Anatolia and Rumelia (*Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti*)

CUP Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti*)

HP People's Party (*Halk Partisi*)

IAW International Alliance of Women

LRP Liberal Republican Party (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*)

PKK Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*)

PRP Progressive Republican Party (*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*)

RPP Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*)

TDK Turkish Linguistic Society (*Türk Dil Kurumu*)

TTK Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*)

Introduction and the Statement of the Argument

This thesis is a thematic analysis of the single-party years of the Turkish Republic. From 1925 to 1945 Turkey was a single-party state which was ruled by the Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* – RPP). The founder and the “Eternal Chief”¹ of the party; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, also served as a strong president accountable to none until his death in 1938. He was followed by İsmet İnönü, a close associate and long-time Prime Minister to Atatürk who took over these positions until the dismantling of the regime between 1946 and 1950. In the single-party era, Republican People's Party and its chiefs promoted the notion of a modern, strong, secular, and independent nation-state, with a monolithic, cohesive society undivided by social classes, ideological differences and diverse ethnic, linguistic or gender-based identities. The main objective of the Republican elite was modernization which was defined by Atatürk as the goal of “reaching and surpassing the level of the contemporary civilization”.²

Although the single-party system came into existence in 1923 as a de-facto situation, it only became official when the multiple, non-consecutive periods of multi-party experiences came to a bitter end in 1930. From that point on, the political sphere in Turkey was limited to a single ruling party, until this system was dismantled by the same party itself after 1945. During the final phases of the Second World War, the Republican regime started to embrace a more democratic appearance to gain itself universal legitimacy and a place among the emerging Western bloc in the post-war world. With the first open, fair and competitive elections which were held in 1950, the transition to democracy was complete. From that point on Turkey became a democracy although it was and still is, a very brittle and imperfect one, constantly clouded by the presence of a powerful military which periodically intervened with the political sphere, and suffered from the insufficiency of the civil society participation to the political

¹ Atatürk, who was declared the “Eternal Leader” of the party at the Second Party Congress in 1927, was acknowledged as the “Eternal Chief” of Turkey after his death.

² Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Söylev ve Demeçleri II* (Ankara: AAM, 2006 [1959]), pp. 318-319.

decision making procedures which was caused by the constant expansion of the state and bureaucracy in expense of personal freedoms.

This research starts out from the presupposition that the single-party Turkey was an authoritarian regime which shared many similarities with its contemporary authoritarian European states. These similarities such as the limitations on political and social pluralism, the utilization of personal charisma as a form of government, the building of a political religion by the sacralisation of the ruling entity, and totalitarian traits of the regime will constitute the central themes which the thesis is focused on. Upon inspecting documents from the central institutions of the regime such as, the Prime Minister's Office, scanning through newspapers which acted as mere mouth-pieces for the government and examining non-documental evidences such as the language deployed by the ruling elite, Republican art and public monuments, I tried to discover the nature of the Turkish single-party experience.

This research argues that the Republican regime was indisputably authoritarian and it disagrees with the prevalent theses on early Republican history which attribute a tutelary character to the regime. According to the findings of the research, the Republican era was neither a well-planned transitional phase to democracy, nor an unfortunate necessity whose authoritarian attitude was determined by the coercive internal and external conditions. The Republican elite's decision to implement an authoritarian regime was born out of ideological and functional concerns.

Ideologically, the regime was impatient about modernization, due to the devastating effects of the losses, disasters and sufferings the Muslim Ottoman community went through in the long 19th century. Republicans, like many of their fascist and totalitarian contemporaries, believed that they were living through a 'special time',³ a watershed moment in Turkish history and they needed to act drastically, and radically to save the future of the country. Therefore they perceived the modernization issue as a life-or-death situation, positioned the dichotomy between the non-modern, eastern, Islamicate 'past' and modern, western 'now' in the core of

³ Many totalitarian regimes and movements felt that they were caught in the midst of a sea change in history, a 'special time' which followed the Age of Reason and was not restricted by the old-fashioned boundaries of humanitarian values, ordinary politics and common sense. This pervasive and almost religious idea of a being selected to achieve special deeds, led these movements to take drastic, extreme measures to pursue their ideals. For the concept, see Roger Griffin, "The Fascist Quest to Regenerate Time." Matthew Feldman (Ed.), *A Fascist Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 4.

their actions and aimed for a ‘civilizational leap’ from the ‘eastern’ to the ‘universal’ or ‘western’ civilization. To achieve this aim, the regime needed a society which can be easily controlled.

Therefore they tried to establish a new, national ‘ideal community’ out of the multi-cultural, Islamicate remnants of the late Ottoman society through a total social transformation. The society they envisaged was a cohesive, monolithic bloc, without any ideological, class-based, gender-bases, internationalist, ethnic, linguistic, tribal, regional differences between its members. All policies of the regime were performed to reach these twin targets of modernization and creating an ideal, national community. To achieve these goals, the regime implemented aggressive, radical and drastic policies which brought Republican Turkey closer to the fascist regimes and political religions of the inter-war era.

The temporal scope of this study coincides with the rise of authoritarian regimes in Europe which emerged out of a complex range of historical forces. The reasons for this phenomenon were the power vacuum in Europe due the collapse of order after the First World War, the destruction of the pre-war social order, the prevalent psychological need for a strong government, the perceived success of Mussolini’s and Hitler’s regimes, the global economic crisis of 1929 and liberalism’s inability to deal with the problems related to these issues. All of these problems effected the post-Ottoman Turkey as well, which became a fertile ground for the Republican ideals of establishing an ideal, national community and a strong, effective government. It should be noted that although there are similarities between Republican Turkey and its contemporary authoritarian states, Republican regime was not a copy of European authoritarianism. Policies associated with the *zeitgeist* of the inter-war era, such as anti-parliamentarism, strong leadership figures, and assimilationist or exclusionary policies focusing on building ‘ideal communities’ certainly played a role in the development of the Republican regime, but this role was mostly supplementary to the internal ideological concerns of the regime. These external conditions did not create or shape the Republican policies, but they arguably solidified the authoritarian attitudes of the regime during the creation of an ‘ideal’ national community.

The subjects of the research are mainly the governmental policies towards; the creation of a powerful monolithic state authority, the assimilation of various ethnic,

religious and linguistic communities into the ‘ideal community’, the exclusion of the discontent parts of the population from the political, social and cultural spheres, the means of the control and the indoctrination the society according to the new ideology, and the creation of a new Turkish society. Throughout the study the ideology and policies of the regime will be examined through the lenses of fascism and political religions. Fascism, in this study, is defined as an authoritarian, revolutionary, and ultra-nationalist movement or regime, whose policies are based on the elimination of the internal and external enemies of the nation to revive it, and reclaim its past glories. Political religions are defined as totalitarian regimes which aimed to replace all religious, political, social and individual identities in the country with an official, omnipresent state-ideology which emerges out of a process of “sacralisation” – or attributing sacredness to – of secular entities such as the state, the ruling party, its ideology and leaders. Throughout this study, these two concepts are used to illuminate the Republican policies of modernization and creating a new national community which was isolated from the interference of internationalist ideologies and cleansed from various forms of political and social discontent. This study argues that to reach their first target of modernization, the regime encircled the community using a plethora of ideological weapons, such as the education system, cult of personalities of the presidents, sacralisation of the ruling party and created an ‘ideological singularity’ in the country through the instrumentality of a political religion. To reach their second goal of creating an easily controllable national community, the regime attacked all sources of plurality in Turkey, and used assimilationist policies to eliminate the differences which brought them very close the fascism.

Sources: Their Limitations and How They Influenced the Research

The entire catalogue of the Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry (*Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivleri* – BCA) is examined for this research. Specific sections of these documents which are heavily used in the dissertation are; documents from the Private Secretariat of the Prime Ministry, correspondence sent to Prime Ministry, documents of the General Directorate of Documentation Office of the Prime Ministry, correspondence between the Prime Ministry and other ministries, decrees of the Council of the Ministers, catalogue of Republican People’s Party documents and

papers, and records of the Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Public Works, and the Ministry of Natural Resources. Other sources which were frequently utilized in the research are; the Archives of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, the texts of the significant legislations implemented by the regime, the minutes of the parliamentary discussions, several newspapers of the regime-friendly media, and memoirs, public speeches and writings of the Republican ruling-elite.

Among these, the governmental documents, such as the orders from party chiefs and ministers, laws that were implemented by the ruling elite, and the publications of the state-sponsored media were examined to penetrate to the psyche of the regime. To better comprehend the sizeable impact of the party chiefs on the state ideology, the collected speeches and declarations of President Atatürk, the memoirs and speeches of his successor İnönü were used. Apart from these names who were located at the very top of the ruling elite, the memoirs written by their colleagues – especially people from Atatürk’s inner circle –, and other middle to high level officials were also examined. Written reports on the debates held in the parliament, Republican People’s Party’s party programmes and regulations, records of the party congresses, party publishing, statutes, declarations, and reports, constitute other primary sources. The research did also benefit from the newspapers and periodicals, especially which are published by Republican People’s Party members and acted as mouth-pieces for the regime.⁴ Among these diverse sources, the archival materials which are collected from the Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry do hold a central position in the research.

The catalogue of the Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry is rich in quantity and varied in context. These documents range from the security intelligences to the reports sent from the Republican People’s Party branches to the party centre. They reveal detailed information on how the regime regulated the media, monitored the activities of the party branches, and dealt with security questions. Yet, despite the

⁴ Following the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925, and more specifically after the implementation of the new Press Law of 1931, the media in Turkey was brought under total control of the government. This law made political subservience to the regime a condition for all members of the publishing business. In 1938, further amendments to the Press Law reserved the right of publishing only to the publishers who obtained permission from the government or the local authorities. With this article, solely the newspaper owners who were partners with the Republican regime managed to survive in the business. For the full text of the law, see *Resmi Gazete*, No. 1867 (June 25, 1931), Law No. 1881, pp. 365-378. For the amendments of 1938, see *Resmi Gazete*, No. 3960 (July 15, 1938), Law No. 3518, pp. 1105-1106.

relatively large size and significance of the Archives of the Prime Ministry, these archives include only a small part of the original documentation regarding the inner workings of the ruling party, because the archives of the Republican People's Party were destroyed during the military coup of 1980 while the party was closed down. Today only a small section of the documents from the party archives are available at the Archives of the Prime Ministry. Another major archive in Turkey, the military archives, are not a part of this research because during the era which is inspected, the military was under governmental control and its impact in the political sphere was relatively weaker comparing to the other eras of the modern history of Turkey. Due to these physical restrictions the archives of the Prime Ministry which contain numerous documents on the governmental practices became the centre of this research. Therefore the single-party administration of the era and their actions constitute the focus of this study. In addition to the material limitations that led the research to focus on the governmental practices, there are historical realities supporting this outcome as well.

In single-party era Turkey, the Republican elite who held all the significant positions in the political sphere, shared their authority and power only with a rather small minority which consisted of large landowners, industrialists and the military. Although these elements established various pressure groups to shape the policies of the government which concerned their own respective fields, they never interfered with the ideological formation, and the reform programme of the single-party regime which single-handedly regulated the social and cultural spheres in Turkey. Therefore, although a form of 'limited pluralism' was evident in the single-party regime of Turkey, the interests of the components forming this pluralism did not clash with the total control the regime had over the people of Turkey. Furthermore, throughout the single-party era every source of political presence which existed outside of state authority was gradually eliminated. Following the demise of the opposition in the Parliament between 1920 and 1923, the opposition parties were abolished after 1925 and independent social organizations were absorbed by the state. Eventually, in 1930s, even the relative autonomy of the single-party's own local branches were perceived as a threat to the total state authority and with the party-state merger of 1936, the party was dissolved within the state. Starting from this date until 1945, no political presence outside the government was permissible for the regime. Unlike the German example,

where competing institutions tried to undercut each other constantly to gain more power and Hitler's recognition, in Turkey the regime swallowed the contesting institutions as well.⁵ Therefore, especially in this particular era of Turkish history, the state emerged as an almighty force, step-by-step eliminating and swallowing every other political and social institution which left 'nothing outside the state' in the political, social and cultural spheres.⁶ This reality further justifies the necessity of focusing on the state ideology and actions, and therefore the methodological priorities of this research.

Organisation of the Study

The thesis is consisted of four chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter is a historical analysis of the period of 1930-1945 which provides a summary of how different historians dealt with the Turkish authoritarianism. It presents the most significant academic perspectives regarding the single-party era. In this chapter the secondary literature on the Turkish single-party years is assessed. Therefore, the chapter is a combination of a literature review and an elementary narrative of the principal historical events of the Turkish single-party era. The chapter also establishes

⁵ In the German single-party regime there was a constant struggle between various elements of governance including Hitler himself, the Nazi Party, "the state, and traditional holders of social, economic, political, or cultural power." Paxton defines this type of authoritarian regimes as "*polyocracies*" and suggests that this phenomenon does come into existence when the authoritarian leadership method "cascades down through the social and political pyramid, creating a host of petty *Führers* and *Duces*." Similarly, Kershaw points out that in Nazi Germany, Hitler was detached from the daily work of government, which led the people working under him to try anticipating his will about the issue at hand and to improvise, as if they had to "channel" Hitler. Kershaw describes this process as "working towards Hitler." In time this arbitrary way of decision-making spread throughout the nation and paved the way to the deterioration of the moral and humanitarian values and the cessation of altruism. Nazi Germany became a country where the only indicator that evaluated an action or decision was Hitler's happiness. In the Turkish example, although a similar sycophancy and arbitrariness of the bureaucrats is evident, the party leaders were not detached from the daily workings of the government and policy making procedures. For more information on the inter-service rivalry of the German single-party experience, see Robert O. Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 2004), pp. 126-127, and Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 320-321.

⁶ This ever-increasing authority and power of the Republican state is comparable to the Italian example and it reminds of Mussolini's famous quote on the importance of the state in Fascist Italy. In the *Doctrine of Fascism*, published in 1931, Mussolini wrote the following: "To the Fascist, *everything is found within the state and nothing can or may be found outside the state*." See Jens Petersen, "The History of the Concept of Totalitarianism in Italy." Hans Meier (Ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume I: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1996]), p. 13.

the authoritarian nature of the regime which is further explained in the following chapters by using three different lenses: fascism, political religions and modernization.

The second chapter is dedicated to fascism which is the first heuristic lens that is used in this study to assess the Turkish authoritarianism. The first part of the chapter is deliberately theoretical and it constitutes of a brief summary of the historiography of fascism. The second part is dedicated to the evaluation of the Turkish authoritarianism by comparing its policies and deeds with the characteristics of fascism. In this chapter, from among its numerous definitions, Roger Griffin's definition of fascism which has become widely accepted in the field since its inception in the early 1990s, is utilized. Griffin's definition puts special emphasis on the revolutionary nature and ultra-nationalist ideology of fascism, therefore the existence of these two aspects of fascism in the Turkish single-party regime is particularly questioned in this chapter.⁷ To determine the policies and actions of the regime, a combination of secondary and primary sources is used, while the secondary sources constitute the majority. The primary sources are mostly texts of legislations. The main objectives of the chapter is to find if there is enough evidence to qualify the single-party regime as a fascist regime while focusing primarily on its revolutionary and nationalist policies. The chapter argues that the single-party regime had fascist tendencies; especially in the field of 'cleansing' the society from unwanted identities to create an 'ideal community' without any diversity.

The third chapter deals with the concept of political religions and how the Turkish single-party regime created a political religion by sacralising secular entities such as the ruling party itself, its history and its leaders, mainly Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Political religions are political systems which emerged during the inter-war era and strongly resembled the structure, power, intrusiveness, and pervasiveness of the organized religions. Similar to the traditional religions, political religions have sacred codes and liturgies. Gentile states that the political religions resemble "new churches devoted to propagandizing faith in absolute and unquestionable ideological truths, persecuting the unfaithful and worshipping sacralised human entities". According to Gentile, these new secular religions are established through "the sacralisation of politics", a process which he describes as the "merging of the religious

⁷ Roger Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Pinter, 1991), p. 26.

and political dimensions” where the regime takes over the features of a religion.⁸ The chapter starts with the historiography of the concept and continues with the examination of the single-party years through the lens of political religions. In this chapter as well, a combination of secondary and primary sources is used, while the primary sources constitute the majority. The primary sources used in this chapter are texts of legislations, minutes of parliamentary debates, speeches of the leaders of the single-party, and documents located at the Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry. The secondary sources are mostly reports and newspaper articles written by the members of the regime-friendly media of the Republican regime, and memoirs and essays written by important figures of the regime. Along with the written documents, public events such as parades, and public celebrations, and the imagery employed by the regime such as the public monuments are used as sources in this chapter, as well. The main objective of the chapter is to find if there is enough evidence to qualify the single-party regime as a political religion while focusing primarily how the regime utilized the cult of personalities of its leaders to survive and established sacralised entities out of the secular ones to encircle the society completely. Since every political religion is designed as simple dichotomies – as almost pseudo-religious, celestial fights between the ‘positive force’ which is represented by the regime and ‘decadent’ powers – the chapter also aims to find who Turkish authoritarianism’s enemy was. The chapter argues that it seems more than reasonable to state that in the single-party era Turkey, this pseudo-religious battle was fought between the single-party ideology and – not an external or even a material force – the past of the country. Single-party Turkey was an entity which was in war with its memories, and it aimed to eradicate all remnants of the imperial, multi-national, Islamic past through a series of modernizing reforms, which are examined in detail in the following chapter.

The fourth chapter focuses on the modernization project of the single-party regime. This chapter shows how the strictly modernist approach of the Republican elite can be interpreted as the paramount motivation and the principal reasoning behind the ideological formation, and the key policies of the regime. As an authoritarian state, the central conflict which gave the regime a coherent identity was the perceived clash between the modernizing power of the Republican regime and the non-modern institutions and mind-sets which were, according to the ruling elite, mostly associated

⁸ Emilio Gentile, *Politics as Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 45.

with Islam, ‘the Orient’, and the culture and traditions emanated from them. Starting from 1925, the regime implemented a series of reforms to eradicate these ‘non-modern’ values from the society. This chapter examines the characteristics of this series of reforms and connects them with the motivations of the Republican political religion. The first part of this chapter deals with the concept of modernization, its historical background in Turkey, and the modernization attempts on the important social issues such as the women rights and education. The latter part of the chapter focuses on the destruction the modernization project caused within the society, concentrating mainly on one incident; the military campaigns of 1937-1938 in which the Dersim region in the Eastern Turkey came to the brink of almost total annihilation. In this chapter as well, a combination of secondary and primary sources is used. The majority of these sources are primary sources including documents about Dersim which were not published before. These documents are composed of security intelligences and the reports of civil bureaucrats which were prepared about the Dersim region, and the internal correspondences of several government offices dating back to the preparation and the implementation periods of the military campaigns targeting Dersim. The main objective of the chapter is to show how the modernity project in authoritarian Turkey worked, including both its constructive and mostly destructive aspects, and how this project was related to the general theme of the thesis, the existence of a Republican political religion which aimed for the total transformation of the society.

The research is not based on case studies. Only the chapter focusing on modernization is mostly devoted to the Dersim Massacres. The remaining chapters utilize a mixture of smaller events. For instance, in the chapter on political religions, a bureaucratic debate on creating an official regulation concerning how the portraits of the party chiefs should be hung on the walls of the state offices, is used. In these interesting documents which were found in Archives of the Prime Ministry,⁹ one can see that the regime took such a trivial issue so seriously, they even established a commission from the highly ranked state officials, including even ministers, to solve the conundrum of which portrait goes where. This little incident, maybe overlooked by other historians as an insignificant issue, speak volumes of how the state tried to build a political religion with precise rituals and symbols. One of the objectives of this

⁹ BCA: File 242, 30..10.0.0/ 1.8...8.

research is to bring these overlooked anecdotes to the light and show how they share the same leitmotif regarding the nature of Turkish single-party regime of Turkey.

In summary this research suggests, that the regime of the early Republican era stands out as an overtly nationalist, authoritarian regime which aimed for the total transformation of the society through a swift, comprehensive and radical process of reforms, established a political religion based on sacralised secular entities such as the party and its leaders, and placed the dichotomy between the non-modern, eastern, imperial ‘past’ of Turkey and the modern, western, nationalist ‘now’, which was represented by the single-party itself, in its core. The Republican regime was not transitional, neither had a guilty conscience about the lack of pluralism within the system. Although it was influenced by the zeitgeist of the era, it was born out of internal conditions in Turkey. The mind-set of the leaders of the regime were formed during the sorrowful days of late-Ottoman era, which made them radical and uncompromising while implementing their reform projects. Like shown in the last chapter of this study, this unyielding and inflexible loyalty shown by the Republican elite to their ideological agenda led to some positive developments in Turkey, especially in fields of education and women’s rights but it equally led to destruction, as well, which manifested itself in its most bloody form in Dersim.

Chapter 1

The Historical Background

The Establishment of the Single-Party Regime in Turkey

The single-party regime of Turkey, which lasted in various forms, from 1923 to 1950 was a product of the events of the late-Ottoman era. Most of the important political actors of the Republican era, were already politicized during the Hamidian era which lasted from 1878 to 1908. Sultan Abdülhamid II was an authoritarian figure and he was severely criticized for betraying the pro-constitutionalist ideals of the bureaucratic and the military elites who brought him to power in 1876 with a coup d'état, suspending the constitution, and dismissing the Parliament altogether after its members criticized the handling of the disastrous Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. Although Hamidian regime was authoritarian and religiously conservative, in this era the modernization attempts which started in the empire in the late 18th century were intensified, especially in the spheres of education, military and transportation.¹⁰ In fact, Abdülhamid's enthusiastic reforms concerning the military led to the emergence of a new class of young idealist officers who felt a strong attachment to the ideal of "saving the fatherland".¹¹ The need for saving the country from the authoritarian rule of the sultan also became widespread among the members of the intelligentsia. Though their actions were closely monitored by the regime, these intellectuals still managed to build close contacts with Europe and the Turks living in Russia, mainly through their members who went to live in self-imposed exile in Europe. In time the paths of these idealist military officers and intellectuals converged in the form of the Young Turk movement. Most of the prominent names of the Republican ruling elite, including Mustafa Kemal, were members of this movement.

¹⁰ For more information on Sultan Abdülhamid's reign, see Benjamin C. Fortna, "The Reign of Abdulhamid II." Reşat Kasaba (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 38-61., and Selim Deringil, "Legitimacy Structures in the Ottoman State: the Reign of Abdulhamid II." *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 23/3 (1991), pp. 345-359.

¹¹ Şerif Mardin, "Yenileşme Dinamiğinin Temelleri ve Atatürk." Tarık Zafer Tunaya (Ed.) *Çağdaş Düşüncenin Işığında Atatürk* (İstanbul: Eczacıbaşı Vakfı, 1983), p. 218.

Young Turk (*Jön Türkler*) was an umbrella term for a movement which had members from many different ideological currents ranging from liberals to Turkish proto-nationalists who agreed on the lowest common denominator; a regime change to oust the sultan, reinstate the constitution, and stop the dissolution of the Empire. In time, the Committee of Union and Progress (*İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti* – CUP), a secret society which was established in 1889, became the paramount organization of the movement. In 1908, the group organized the Young Turk Revolution which ushered the Second Constitutional Era,¹² reinstated the constitution, and replaced Abdülhamid's authoritarian rule with a constitutional monarchy. Organized political parties, competitive elections and vibrant parliamentary discussions were also products of this era, but similarly to the short-lived experiment of the First Constitutional Era, this parliamentary experience had also its problems. Its procedures were continuously plagued by coups, upheavals and ongoing wars but the democratic experiment still managed to continue, until 1913 when a clique within the Committee of Union and Progress consolidated its power after a counter-coup. The elections of 1914 were contested only by the CUP members and democratic competition came to end. From that point on, until the end of the First World War, the Ottoman Empire was ruled by a small clique of Unionists which sided with the German Empire during the First World War against the Allied Powers.

Following the utter defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the war, the members of this Unionist clique fell from grace and after the occupation of the capital Istanbul by the Allied Powers, most influential members of the Committee, such as the members of the ruling triumvirate, Talat, Enver¹³ and Cemal Pashas departed the

¹² For information on the Committee of Union and Progress, The Young Turk Revolution of 1908 and the Second Constitutional Era, see Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: The Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics, 1908-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969); Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat Terakki* (Ankara: İmge Kitabevi, 1998 [1980]); M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Örgüt Olarak Osmanlı İttihad ve Terakki Cemiyeti ve Jön Türklük, 1889-1902* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1986); *The Young Turks in Opposition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Aykut Kansu, *The Revolution of 1908 in Turkey* (Leiden: Brill, 1997).

¹³ İsmail Enver (1881-1922) who was commonly known as Enver Pasha after becoming a general in 1914, was one of the leaders of the Committee of Union and Progress who played an important role in the 1908 Revolution. In 1913, along with Mehmed Talat (Pasha) and Ahmed Cemal (Pasha), he became one of the members of the triumvirate which ruled the Ottoman Empire until 1918 and served as the Minister of War (1914-1918). In this era, his influence on Ottoman politics and social life was so significant, some German sources described the Ottoman Empire of this period as “*Enverland*”. Following the Ottoman defeat in the First World War, Enver moved initially to Moscow to seek Soviet support to go back to Turkey and become the leader of the nationalist cause. After being refused by the Soviets, he moved to Central Asia where he was killed in battle while fighting against the Soviets in August 1922.

Empire with the help of their German allies. Along with Istanbul, other parts of the Empire were also invaded by the Allies according to the Treaty of Sevres, which was signed on August 10, 1920 and concluded the disastrous First World War for the Ottoman Empire. This was an extremely harsh peace treaty. The preparation process in which even the most reasonable Turkish pleas were constantly overlooked, the aggressiveness of the tone of the agreement, and the scorched-earth mentality of the Allies, which aimed to reduce Ottoman Empire to impotency, were identical to the attitude shown towards Germany during the preparation of the Treaty of Versailles but unlike the latter, the Treaty of Sevres was never ratified due to the success of the resistance movement emerged out of Anatolia. Following the defeat, local resistance groups, which were known as 'Defence of Rights Committees' (*Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyetleri*) were formed all around the Muslim populated areas of the Anatolian peninsula. Instead of forming armed resistance units, these organizations tried to pursue legal action based on a particular article of the 'Fourteen Points' of President Wilson, which guaranteed the right of self-rule of the Muslims in the remaining parts of the Empire.¹⁴ The Treaty of Sevres, especially its harshness and extremely negative attitude to the Ottoman Muslim pleas legitimized and intensified the resistance led by these committees. In this context, the Greek occupation of Izmir and the French occupation of Southern Anatolia can be perceived as significant moments in the development of the resistance movement, because they propelled the peaceful resistance into an armed action against the opposition forces. In time, these small pockets of resistance around Anatolia were merged into a full-fledged nationalist rebellion.

Another catalyst for the nationalist resistance was the arrival of the high-ranked Ottoman bureaucrats, politicians and military officers to Anatolia. One of these military officers, Mustafa Kemal Pasha,¹⁵ arrived to Northern Anatolia in May 1919, and due to his stature as a successful military commander with promising leadership

¹⁴ Article XII of the 'Fourteen Points' stated that "the Turkish portion of the present Ottoman Empire should be assured a secure sovereignty..." For the full text of the 'Fourteen Points', see Wilson's Message to Congress, January 8, 1918; Records of the United States Senate; Record Group 46; Records of the United States Senate; National Archives.

¹⁵ Since surnames did not exist in Turkey until 1934, Atatürk used his given name (Mustafa) and middle name (Kemal) together with his military rank, Pasha (General). Due to his achievements in the War of Independence he was presented with the title of Gazi (War veteran) by the Grand Assembly and used this title until the adoption of the Surname Law in 1934, which gave him the surname, "Atatürk" (The Father of Turkish people).

qualities, his political acumen and his unblemished past owing to his previous exclusion from the most upper echelons of the Committee of Union and Progress which was associated by the public with the catastrophe of the World War, he managed to become the leader of the nationalist movement. In September 1919, various local resistance groups were merged into 'Defence of Rights Group of Anatolia and Rumelia' (*Anadolu ve Rumeli Müdafaa-i Hukuk Cemiyeti* – A-RMHC), which became the central organization responsible of building up the national resistance against the occupation in Anatolia. Defence of Rights Group was an umbrella body, where various ideologies, beliefs and identities were represented and did unite to reach a common, definite goal of ending the foreign occupation and restoring national sovereignty.¹⁶ Most members of the A-RMHC became parliament members after the establishment of the Grand National Assembly (*Büyük Millet Meclisi*) in Ankara on April 23, 1920 and contributed to the nationalist struggle known as the Turkish War of Independence. Mustafa Kemal acted both as the political and the military leader of the nationalist forces in this period, as the Speaker of the Parliament and the Head of the Government in Ankara, as well as being the Supreme Commander of the nationalist armies.

The Republican People's Party, the single-party that ruled Turkey between 1923 and 1950 has emerged out of this nationalist movement. From the early days of the resistance there was a clash among the nationalists between the supporters of Mustafa Kemal and his critics. The criticism derived mainly from personal rifts, Kemal's increasing power at the expense of the parliament and from the continuation of several political rivalries from the Second Constitutional Era. In May 1921, Kemal established a political group in the Grand National Assembly, from the deputies who were loyal to him, which was known as the First Group (*Birinci Grup*).¹⁷ In time, members who did not belong this group, started to be known as the Second Group (*İkinci Grup*). The Second Group was made up of parliament members, who, although they gave full support to the common cause of the National Assembly, were critical of Mustafa Kemal's actions, mainly his ever increasing power at the expense of the

¹⁶ Rustow states the local constituents of the A-RMHC which called themselves "Defence of Rights" or "Rejection of Annexation" committees consisted mostly of school teachers, ex-government officials, local religious officials, and other small town notables. In many provinces they amounted to a direct continuation of the recently dissolved Committee of Union and Progress. See Dankwart A. Rustow, "Atatürk as a Founder of State." *Daedalus*, Vol. 97, No. 3 (1968), pp. 797.

¹⁷ For more information on the First and Second Groups, see Ahmet Demirel, *Birinci Meclis'te Muhalefet: İkinci Grup* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1994); and Hakkı Uyar, "Tarihe Nasıl Bakmak? Türk Devrimi, İkinci Grup ve Hüseyin Avni Ulaş Örneği." *Toplumsal Tarih*, No. 18 (June 1995).

National Assembly. Mustafa Kemal's seizure of the legislative power of the Assembly through the instrumentality of the Law on Supreme Military Command (*Başkomutanlık Yasası*), which was accepted in the National Assembly on August 5, 1921, caused uproar among the members of the Second Group. Mustafa Kemal had total control of state affairs after the adoption of this law; he did not just take the legislative powers of the assembly but gathered executive power and jurisdiction as well, through the Independence Courts.¹⁸

With this law, which was later extended to the end of the war,¹⁹ the authority of the Grand National Assembly which started its life as a legislative, and executive body was curbed severely. This change led to the intensification of the opposition within the parliament. The Second Group started to demand National Assembly's supervision on the decisions of the Independence Courts, the non-extension of Mustafa Kemal's supreme command, and revoking of the death sentences imposed for 'opposition to the regime.' Although later described as reactionaries and conservatives from the standpoint of Republican historiography, the members of the group voted similarly to the First Group in many significant events, in fact they even approved the capitulation of the sultanate on November 1, 1922. Furthermore, the percentage of Muslim clerics and Sufi religious leaders in the Second Group was much lower than that of the First Group, as well.²⁰ According to some observers the differences between the two groups were minimal, almost non-existent except for personal problems. For instance, politician and author Suphi Nuri İleri, a contemporary of both groups stated, that they did not represent two distinct political poles and the differences between them were merely on personal level. İleri suggested that since the majority of the members of both groups belonged to the same generation, were educated in the same schools, and came from the same small bourgeoisie background, it was impossible for

¹⁸ Independence Courts (*İstiklâl Mahkemeleri*) were special courts founded during the War of Independence with extraordinary authority to punish crimes such as high treason, espionage, rebellions and desertions. The Courts were accountable to the Parliament, and their decisions were not appealable. After the end of the war, the courts were closed but during the early Republican era for three further occasions their authority were reinstated. These courts and the reasons for their establishment, or their most significant cases are: Istanbul Independence Court which dealt with the "Case of the Journalists" (December 1923-February 1924), Eastern Independent Courts which were established to deal with the "Sheikh Said Revolt" (March 1925-March 1927), and Ankara Independence Courts which were mostly associated with the "Izmir Assassination Attempt" (March 1925-March 1927). For more information of the Independence Courts, see Ergün Aybars, *İstiklâl Mahkemeleri, 1920-1927* (Izmir: İleri, 1995).

¹⁹ Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması 1923-1931* (Istanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1981), pp. 38-39.

²⁰ Demirel, *Birinci Meclis'de Muhalefet*, pp. 144-150.

them to produce two entirely distinct political entities. Therefore he concluded that the main political struggle of the era was between the supporters and adversaries of Mustafa Kemal and the main reason of the animosity derived from personal issues.²¹

Despite the fractions that it created in the political sphere, the Law on Supreme Military Command proved to be a success in the military sphere. While Mustafa Kemal took the control of the armies of the Grand National Assembly, the war on the Eastern front was already over. The armies of Ankara have defeated the newly established republic of Armenia and quickly recovered the Eastern territories lost in the post-war settlement in December, 1920. On the Western front, the fight was still continuing to stop the advance of the invading Greek armies. In early September 1921, a month later than the promulgation of the law, the nationalist forces under Mustafa Kemal's direct control managed to stop the Greek Army at the Sakarya River. From that point on, the fate of the war was changed and the Greek Army retreated to protect their newly acquired possessions, while nationalist forces gained further ground. With a decisive final attack in August 1922, the nationalist forces drove out the Greek Army out of Anatolia. Following the military victory, the Treaty of Sevres was revised with the superseding the Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed on July 24, 1923. From a disastrous war experience, the nationalist movement emerged as partially victorious, by restoring the lands that had been proposed to be given to Greece, Armenia, and parts of southern Anatolia, which was given to France. The new Turkey was religiously and culturally more homogenous,²² and had total sovereignty over Turkish territory except for the Straits region, which remained under the supervision of an international commission. The nationalist movement accomplished most of their goals.

These military and diplomatic successes gave Mustafa Kemal a tremendous amount of prestige and earned him the respect of the masses. Kemal used this opportunity to transform the First Group into a full-fledged political party called People's Party²³ on September 9, 1923. The Second Group members were first

²¹ Suphi Nuri İleri, "İkinci Grup Meselesi." Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Zeynep Kerman, Necat Birinci & Abdullah Uçman (Eds.) *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), p. 59.

²² While, in 1906, 20 per cent of the Ottoman population were non-Muslims, in 1927 the ratio dropped to a mere 2.5 per cent which means that only 1/8 of the non-Muslims of the pre-war population continued to live in Turkey after the war. The rest of it either died in the war, were deported, massacred or voluntarily migrated to adjacent countries. See Çağlar Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey* (New York: Verso, 1987), pp. 102-104.

²³ On November 10, 1924, the party was renamed as the Republican People's Party.

marginalized and then eliminated from the political sphere after the September 1923 elections. According to Tunçay, the Second Group members and some former associates of the CUP were discouraged from standing or forced not to stand in elections and even if they managed to stand, people were pressured to not vote for them.²⁴ On October 29, 1923, the establishment of the Turkish Republic was officially proclaimed and Mustafa Kemal became the President of the Republic, an office which he held until his death in 1938. In this early era of the Republican rule which would last until 1925, political pluralism was not entirely forbidden. There was no law prohibiting the establishment of opposition parties. This period witnessed to several drastic changes in Turkey. Important Islamic institutions such as the Ministry of Religious Affairs and *medreses*, traditional schools which gave courses on Islamic theology, were closed by the government. After outlawing the *medreses*, a secular union in the field of education was established with issuing the Law on Unification of Education. Most importantly, on March 3, 1924, the seat of the caliphate, which had continued to exist even after the abolition of the Ottoman sultanate, was abolished. The same year also witnessed to the emergence of first formidable opposition group challenging Mustafa Kemal's ruling party.

This entity was the Progressive Republican Party (*Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası*), which was established in November 17, 1924 and had very reputable founding members. Most of them were Mustafa Kemal's old friends and prominent figures of the War of Independence, such as Kâzım Karabekir,²⁵ Refet Bele,²⁶ Ali Fuat

²⁴ Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, pp. 48-49.

²⁵ Kâzım Karabekir (1882-1948) was a general who led the forces of the nationalists in the Eastern Front of the Turkish War of Independence (1919-1921). Karabekir later served as a Parliament member until 1924 when he left Republican People's Party and became the leader of the Progressive Republican Party. After the closure of his party due to allegations of its involvement with an Islamic revivalist revolt in 1925 and accusations of his involvement in the assassination attempt on Atatürk's life in 1926, he was excluded from the political sphere. Only after Atatürk's death he was rehabilitated and became a parliament member again in 1938. From 1946 until his death he also served as the Speaker of the Parliament.

²⁶ Refet Bele (1877-1963) was the general who was in charge of the South-Western Front of the Turkish War of Independence (1920-1921) and later served as the Minister of Interior (1921) and Minister of War (1921-1922) in the nationalist government. Like Karabekir, he was excluded from politics after 1926 and rehabilitated in 1935 and served as a parliament member until 1950. From 1950 to 1961, he served as the Turkish delegate to the Advisory Commission of the UNRWA (The UN Agency for Palestine Refugees).

Cebesoy,²⁷ Rauf Orbay²⁸ and Adnan Adıvar²⁹ who had reservations regarding the ever increasing authority of Kemal and his radical reform agenda. Except Adnan Adıvar, all of the remaining names have either signed the document or were consulted during the drafting of the Amasya Circular (*Amasya Tamimi*) in June 1919 which is considered as the first written document putting the Turkish War of Independence in motion. Therefore their contribution to the war effort was traceable back to the origins of the nationalist movement. Furthermore, these figures held important political and military offices during the Turkish War of Independence. Therefore the party cadres had experience in administration as well as high amount of prestige that could rival Mustafa Kemal's authority. With such important names in its ranks and a party programme which included references to political and economic liberalism, democracy, a revised and direct election process, decentralization, the establishment of local elections, and implementing restrictions on President's authority³⁰ it was only natural that the Progressive Republican Party would become a serious contender for power and a fierce rival of Atatürk's own Republican People's Party.³¹

The new opposition party also found support in the Grand National Assembly and among some sections of the Istanbul press. In total, 28 parliament members left the Republican People's Party and joined to the ranks of the Progressive Republican

²⁷ Ali Fuat Cebesoy (1882-1968) was a military officer, politician and diplomat. Cebesoy was a college classmate and close friend of Atatürk. During the Turkish War of Independence he served as the Commander of the Western Front (1919-1920) before being sent to Moscow as the head of the crucial diplomatic mission which aimed to obtain Soviet support to the nationalist forces in Ankara. As a politician he served as Parliament member from 1921 to 1925. Due to his allegiance to the Progressive Republican Party he was relegated to political obscurity from 1925 to 1931. He returned to politics in 1931 and served at the Parliament again until 1948 in the RPP. In 1948 he joined the Democratic Party and remained as a Parliament member until the military coup of 1960.

²⁸ Rauf Orbay (1881-1964) was a decorated naval officer who achieved fame due to his successes in the Balkan Wars (1912-1913). He later served as the Minister of Navy in the Ottoman Empire (1918) and the Prime Minister of the nationalist movement during the Turkish War of Independence (1922-1923). After the assassination attempt on Atatürk's life, refusing that he had any involvement with it, Orbay lived in self-exile until his return to Turkey in 1935. After his return Orbay lived under state surveillance but he was rehabilitated after Atatürk's death and became a parliament member again in 1938.

²⁹ Abdülhak Adnan Adıvar (1881-1955) was a Turkish politician, author, historian and medical doctor. Along with his wife Halide Edip, Dr. Adnan was one of the members of Atatürk's most inner circle of friends during the Turkish War of Independence. He was as a member of the parliament both in the Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey (1919-1926). In the early days of the Ankara government he served as the Minister of Health (1920-1921) and Deputy Speaker of the Parliament (1921-1923). Following the closure of his PRP he went to a self-imposed exile in London and Paris until 1939. In 1946 he became a parliament member again and served until 1950.

³⁰ Feroz Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 75.

³¹ For more information on the Progressive Republican Party see Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Political Opposition in the Early Turkish Republic: The Progressive Republican Party, 1924-1925* (Leiden: Brill, 1991) and Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, pp. 104-155.

Party. Along with the wind of political liberalism in the air, Mustafa Kemal appointed Ali Fethi Okyar,³² a close friend and a more liberal party member as the Prime Minister to replace İsmet İnönü, to slow down the liberal opposition and stop the further dissolution of the Republican People's Party. During this period, the political system in Turkey operated similarly to a modern participatory democracy but this pluralism lived only for a short while. In March, a revolt that arose in the South-Eastern Turkey and led by a local leader of the *Nakshbandiyya* Sufi order³³ called Sheikh Said shook up the political sphere. The revolt was participated by the masses, including the standing militia of the Sheikh himself, managed to wreak havoc in the South-eastern country side, and even to threat the large towns and cities. Feeling the need for a stronger government to deal with the disorder created by the rebels, Mustafa Kemal re-appointed İnönü, a politician with a more conservative approach than Okyar, to the Prime Ministry. The new government prepared a new law to quell the revolt which is called the Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu*). The implementation of this law can be read as a watershed moment in Turkish history.

³² Ali Fethi Okyar (1880-1943) was a military officer, politician and diplomat. As one of the closest friends of Atatürk he was active in politics of the late Ottoman Empire and Republican Turkey. He served as a Parliament Member and Minister of Interior during the last days of the Ottoman Empire (1917-1918). Okyar joined to the nationalists in Ankara in 1921. In addition of serving as a member of the parliament on three separate occasions (from 1921 to 1925, briefly in 1930 and lastly from 1939 to 1943), Okyar presided over almost every important office of the regime. Throughout his career, he served as the Prime Minister (1923 and 1924-1925), Speaker of the Parliament (1923-1924), Minister of Defence (1924-1925) and Minister of Justice (1941-1943). As a diplomat Okyar also served as an ambassador in Paris and London.

³³ *Nakshbandiyya* (*Nakşibendilik* in Turkish) is one of the largest and most influential Sufi orders. Founded in the 14th century, the order quickly became the largest one in Central Asia. It started to be practised in Anatolia during the late 15th century. Its Khalidiyya (*Halidiye* in Turkish) branch started to be influential in Ottoman Empire during the early 19th century and replaced Kadiriyya as the largest Sufi order. According to Algar, by the end of the same century, they had more *tekkes* in Istanbul than any other Sufi order. In 1925, with the ban on Sufi orders *Nakshbandiyya* was forced to go underground. After the transition to the multi-party regime in 1950 multiple branches of the order resurfaced and especially after 1970s they regained their prestige due to their links with influential political actors from centre-right parties, and far-right movements in Turkey. During the zenith of its influence, it was widely reported that among the notable sympathizers of the order, were parliament members, ministers, and even prime ministers. Along with *Nurculuk* and *Süleymançılık*; two Sufi orders that are indigenous to Turkey, *Nakshbandiyya* is still one of largest religious orders in Turkey. Today at least four important *Nakshbandi* branches exist in Turkey. These are; the community of İskender Paşa (Fatih district, Istanbul), the community of Erenköy (Erenköy district, Istanbul), the community of İsmailağa (Fatih district, Istanbul) and the community of Menzil (Kahta, Adıyaman). For more information, see Hamid Algar, *Nakşibendilik* (Istanbul: İnsan, 2013); Ruşen Çakır, *Ayet ve Slogan: Türkiye'de İslami Oluşumlar* (Istanbul: Metis, 1990) and Elizabeth Özdalga, "Transformation of Sufi-Based Communities in Modern Turkey: The Naksibendis, the Nurettins, and the Gülen Community." Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem & Philip Robins (Eds.), *Turkey's Engagement with Modernity* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 69-91.

The single article of the new law stipulated that the government was authorized through the instrumentality of executive decrees to prohibit any form of organization, agitation, encouragement, attempt, and publication which aimed to create ‘reactionary activities’, revolt or disturbance of the social order, peace, tranquillity, security and public order of the country.³⁴ When the legislation was brought to the Grand Assembly for ratification, the members of the opposition party staged a determined resistance against it, on the grounds of that the new law was too broad, and in conflict with the basic human rights that were guaranteed by the constitution and gave extreme level of authority to the courts and law enforcement. The opposition believed that this law could target any source of dissidence, including the opposition party and free press of the country and could easily lead to authoritarianism.³⁵ Before long, they proved to be right on this matter.

Although Sheikh Said Revolt contained both Islamic revivalist and Kurdish separatist roots,³⁶ the government downplayed the nationalist motives, and highlighted the Islamic ones. The Islamic roots of the revolt were evident; the leaders of the rebellion regularly preached against the modernization attempts of the government, especially the recent abolition of the Caliphate, and the closing of the Sufi religious orders. Sheikh Said, himself was a leading member of the *Nakshbandiyya* Sufi order. According to Okyar, the Prime Minister of the era, the documents found in the possession of the rebels showed that the main objective of the rebellion was “reinstating Sharia law”.³⁷ Similarly, in a speech at the Grand Assembly, Mustafa Kemal himself defined the events as a reactionary revolt and depicted the

³⁴ For the text of the law, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 15, p. 145.

³⁵ For the reactions of the opposition to the Law on the Maintenance of Order, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 15, pp. 126-158.

³⁶ Nearly all historians agree that the revolt had Islamic and nationalist agendas. The difference of opinions derive from the “amount” of these ideological elements. Olson states that although “both elements were involved” in the revolt the nationalist motivations were more important than the religious factors. Similarly to Olson, Oran recognizes the importance of religious and traditional actors in the revolt but states that the Sheikh Said Revolt was mostly a nationalist one, and defines it as the last “traditional” Kurdish nationalist revolt. On the other hand, Van Bruinessen remarks that the revolt was “neither a purely religious nor a purely nationalist one” but states that the religious factor may have predominated the nationalist element. Similarly, according to Mumcu, the revolt was mostly Islamic. For these accounts, see Robert W. Olson, *The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880-1925* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1989), pp. 152-63, Martin Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaikh and State: The Social and Political Structures of Kurdistan* (London: Zed, 1992), pp. 265-299, Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası*, p. 266, and Uğur Mumcu, *Kürt - İslam Ayaklanması, 1919-1925* (Ankara: Tekin Yayınevi, 1992).

³⁷ Prime Minister Ali Fethi Okyar’s speech at the Grand Assembly, February 25, 1925. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 14, p. 307.

participants as “enemies of the Republic”.³⁸ Furthermore, the regime tried to establish a connection between the new opposition party and the Islamic revivalist agendas of the rebels. The government, which was targeting the opposition party already since a group who had been irritated by the reforms, and former CUP members had joined the Progressive Republican Party before the revolts, exploited the fact that new party had declared before the events that they would be “respectful of religious beliefs.”³⁹ This declaration was considered as evidence of the connection between the reactionary revolt and the PRP. In June 1925, the Progressive Republican Party was banned from political life without any concrete proof of their relations with reactionary movements.

The Law on the Maintenance of Order signified the transition from the multi-party democracy to dictatorship since it provided the government with the frame to impose an authoritarian regime and crush the opposition altogether. The Independence Courts, which had been closed after the military victory, were re-activated in Ankara and Diyarbakır. Martial law in the eastern region of Turkey lasted until November 1927. Dissidents from every part of the political spectrum felt the pressure while more than 500 people were sentenced to death.⁴⁰ This was followed by the suppression of the free press. Although the 1924 constitution guaranteed the rights of the free press and prohibited governmental censorship,⁴¹ by citing the superseding Law for the Maintenance of Order, numerous publications from every part of the political spectrum were banned by the government. Especially the Istanbul press, which was seen by the ruling party as a continuation of the anti-nationalist tendencies of the post-war Istanbul government was targeted in this purge. Along with the newspapers supporting the Progressive Republican Party, socialist and Islamist newspapers which previously criticized the government were banned and shut down. The ban on the socialist publications ‘Sickle and Hammer’ (*Orak-Çekiç*) and ‘Enlightenment’ (*Aydınlık*), which supported neither the revolt nor the Progressive Republican Party, and even supported the government regarding the Sheikh Said case, constitutes a good example of the level of suppression on the media in this era. According to Keyder, in

³⁸ See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 19, p. 8.

³⁹ Article 6 of the party programme stated that the party “would be respectful of religious beliefs and opinions”. *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Ed.), *Terakkiperver Cumhuriyet Fırkası'nın Programı* (Ankara: TBMM Kütüphanesi, 1924), p. 3.

⁴⁰ Tunçay (1981) claims that 660 people were sentenced to death during this period while Aybars (1995) states this number as 576.

⁴¹ Article 77 of the constitution of 1924 proclaimed that the “press is free within the frame of the laws and it could not be held under inspection before publishing.”

this purge the government censored and banned so many publications that the total sale of daily papers, which was 120,000 before the revolt, dropped under 50,000 in 1926.⁴² With this purge in the media, only the newspapers that enjoyed organic ties with the government and the ruling party manage to continue their existence. The multi-party system was able to live only for six months between November 1924 and June 1925.

Furthermore, the single-party regime continued to target the opposition even after the closure of the Progressive Republican Party. The former leaders of the disbanded opposition party were put on trial, in June 1926 on the grounds of that they had been connected to an assassination attempt in Izmir which had targeted Mustafa Kemal. Along with former Progressive Republican Party members, some former CUP members were also tried since the government alleged that there was a linear continuation between former CUP members who disliked Atatürk, the Second Group who opposed him in the parliament and the recently closed Progressive Republican Party. War heroes were later released but they remained excluded from the political life and some of them, such as Karabekir were put under strict surveillance while other such as Orbay and Adivar who were abroad during the trials decided to not come back to Turkey until the normalization of the political sphere.⁴³ Comparing their fate to that of some of their fellow party members, one can say they were, in fact, lucky since out of the twenty-eight deputies of the Progressive Republican Party, six of them, while still serving as members in the parliament were sentenced to death⁴⁴ by the Independence Courts for their role in the assassination attempt, along with nine other people. Additionally, in a separate trial, four former members of the CUP were also hanged. In short time, the entire opposition against the single-party regime was

⁴² Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, p. 108.

⁴³ Although he was unofficially pardoned in 1938 and made a MP after the death of Atatürk by his successor İnönü, the surveillance of Karabekir continued until 1943. For more information see the reports on Karabekir's activities in Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry (Başbakanlık Cumhuriyet Arşivleri – BCA). BCA: 121..10.0.0/ 2.7..1./122522-1 and BCA: 121..10.0.0/ 2.8..1./122522-2.

⁴⁴ Out of the 28 parliament member who left the Republican People's Party and joined the Progressive Republic Party, six of them; Rüşü Pasha, Miralay Arif, İsmail Canbulat, Ahmet Şükrü, Abidin, and Halis Turgut were sentenced to death due to their participation in the assassination attempt on Atatürk's life. Thirteen of the remaining parliament members remained out of the political sphere for the rest of their lives. Two of them, Ali Fuat Cebesoy and Refet Bele, became parliament members again in Atatürk's lifetime after reconciling with him. Seven of them, including Adnan Adivar, Kâzım Karabekir and Rauf Orbay, became MPs again after Atatürk's death, through an amnesty by Atatürk's successor İnönü.

decimated. One may reasonably claim that this act of the government was nothing but a politically motivated operation of vengeance. Since the trend of modern “show trials” in authoritarian states started in the 1930s, the Izmir Assassination trials could be described as a forerunner of this trend.

By 1927, the entire political sphere was cleansed from elements of pluralism. The opposition party was closed, and its members were purged out of the parliament. The social sphere as well was devoid of social organizations whether traditional ones, such as the Sufi religious orders or class-based organizations such as trade unions which could represent different identities of the citizens. The single-party remained as the foremost social and political organization in the country. In October 1927, the single-party regime was further solidified at the Second Grand Congress of the Republican People’s Party. The ideological boundaries of the regime was started to be determined in the Congress, and four tenets which were Republicanism, Populism, Nationalism and Secularism were included in the party regulations as the main principles of the party.⁴⁵ Also, at the Congress, Mustafa Kemal delivered ‘The Great Speech’ (*Nutuk*), his thirty-nine hour long speech which presented the events from 1919 to that day from his perspective. Throughout the speech Kemal discussed the weaknesses and deficiencies of his contemporary political enemies whom he recently silenced after the closing of the Progressive Republican Party and Izmir Assassination Trials. Although they participated in the national resistance right from the start of the Turkish War of Independence, due to the political rivalry between them and Mustafa Kemal, he either downplayed their importance or dismissed their contributions all together. Therefore *Nutuk* settled all of the conflicts of this period in Mustafa Kemal’s favour, thus establishing the official historiography for the events between the War of Independence and 1927. In the same congress, Mustafa Kemal was declared the ‘Eternal Leader’ of the Republican People’s Party and with a change of regulations, he gained the right to handpick all parliament members by himself, a task that previously was a joint responsibility of the party council.⁴⁶ From this point on, elections which were continued to be held until the end of the single-party regime at

⁴⁵ Article 1 of the party regulations stated that “the Republican People’s Party is a republican, populist, and nationalist political organization.” Article 3 of the same text guaranteed the separation of religion and state. See Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Ed.), *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1927), p. 3.

⁴⁶ Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti*, pp. 180-181.

regular intervals, became nothing but elaborate confirmation mechanisms of the decisions made by the President without taking the interests of the local population into consideration. A single-party regime was firmly established by this date, but the global economic crisis of 1929 and the problems it created in Turkey would force the Republican elite to reconsider this political structure in 1930.

The State-Sponsored Multi-Party Experience of 1930

During the first phase of the single-party regime, between 1925 and 1930, the regime implemented important reforms which aimed for modernizing as fast as possible, and at any cost, in every sphere of life, such as the legal system, education, economy and industry to generate everlasting change in the traditional social order. These changes would have served the ultimate objective of altering both the look and the mind-set of the country for good, cutting off the ties with Eastern traditions and culture and firmly integrating Turkey into the Western civilization. Therefore the majority of these reforms targeted the traditions which were constructed over many centuries. These reforms ranged from cosmetic changes such as the abolition of *fez*, the universal male headgear in the Ottoman Empire, to the more substantial ones, such as the abolition of the *dervish* lodges (*Tekke*) and Sufi religious orders⁴⁷ (*Tarikat*) that had represented heterodox Islam for centuries. These reforms that targeted to reduce the visibility and significance of religion in the social sphere were continued with the reforms of de-Islamification of the legal sphere. In 1926, the *Medjelle*, the civil code of the Ottoman Empire which was in use since 1869 was replaced with a new civil code which was adapted from the Swiss civil code. This reform will be followed by the ratification of other legal codes, most importantly, the penal code which was adapted from the Italians and a code of commerce modelled after the German and Italian examples. In 1928, according to the principle of secularism, the expression announcing that the

⁴⁷ Sufi Islam is generally described as Islamic mysticism. For a brief introduction to Sufism see M.G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam, Vol. 1* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1974), pp. 394-409. For a general history of Sufism see A. Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1975) and J.S. Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971). For more information on the importance of Sufism in the Ottoman context, see M.F. Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia after the Turkish invasion (prolegomena)*, trans., ed., intro. Gary Leiser (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993 [1922]); Ahmet T. Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Islamic Later Middle Period, 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994) and Raymond Lifchez (Ed.), *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

official religion of the country was Islam was removed from the constitution; thus Islam ceased to be the state religion. In the same year, “to break Turkey's ties with the Islamic East”⁴⁸ an alphabet reform was implemented and the Arabo-Persian alphabet used in Turkey was replaced by a Turkified version of the Latin alphabet. All of these reforms led to the alienation of some sections of the society from the ruling elite. These sections including the members of the closed Sufi religious orders, and conservatives showed a substantial level of resistance to the reforms. Between December of 1925 and February 1926, at least 57 citizens were sentenced to death by the Independence Courts due to the resistance shown to these reforms⁴⁹ but it seems that the draconian measures taken by the government led to the establishment of a social equilibrium after 1926. From this date on the opposition against the Republican regime went underground and did not come to surface again until the devastating effects of the Global Economic Crisis of 1929 came to the shores of Turkey. To better comprehend the effects of the crisis we should briefly discuss the economic situation in the post-World War Turkey.⁵⁰

In 1923, at the Economy Congress of Izmir (*Izmir İktisat Kongresi*), the regime decided to implement a capitalist economy model based on two crucial principals; the encouragement of national capitalists to make them richer as quickly as possible and the encouragement of foreign investors and capital, especially to make investments that would improve the conditions of the national capitalists. The first principal was a continuation of the economic policies of the CUP which was aimed to create a Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie to replace the influence of the non-Muslim Ottoman citizens had in the economic sphere.⁵¹ To achieve this objective, the ruling party made things easier for the burgeoning Muslim-Turkish capitalists to accumulate private wealth quickly.⁵² Through facilitation during tender procedures, granting privileges

⁴⁸ Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 27.

⁴⁹ Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti*, p. 116. For a detailed list of the cases handled by the Independence Courts between 1925 and 1926, see Aybars, *İstiklâl Mahkemeleri*, pp. 406-418. According to Aybars, the death sentences in these cases were only given to the convicts who exploited the discontent of the people towards the law on headgear to incite revolts against the government. The individual violators of the law were let off with light sentences.

⁵⁰ For a detailed analysis of the economics of the early Republican era, see Korkut Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi 1908-2007* (Ankara: İmge, 2008 [1987]); Çağlar Keyder, *Dünya Ekonomisi İçinde Türkiye, 1923-1929* (İstanbul: Yurt, 1982); and Stefanos Yerasimos, *Az gelişmişlik Sürecinde Türkiye III: 1. Dünya Savaşından 1971’e* (İstanbul: Belge, 1976).

⁵¹ Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Milli İktisat, 1908-1918* (İstanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2012), pp. 190-191.

⁵² Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 119.

on exporting and importing, customs duty exemption and tax exemptions, and the right to collaborate with state monopolies, a group of notables who enjoyed close relations with the party became extremely rich during the early Republican era.

The second objective of the economic model; the encouragement of foreign capital, was immensely successful. According to Oran, the early Republican period was the most open period for the Turkish economy until the Turkish economy's incorporation to globalism, which occurred at the beginning of the twenty-first century.⁵³ One-third of the 210 new joint-stock companies that were established between 1920 and 1930 were joint ventures with foreign capital. While achieving these twin objectives, the Republican People's Party became a bureaucratic-economic empire. Bureaucrats, party members, deputies who cooperated with the newly emerging economic magnates or participated in corporations associated with the foreign investment as founders, shareholders and board members made fortunes almost overnight. According to Bila, in this period the ruling party had turned into a "chamber of commerce."⁵⁴

Most of these party members gathered around *İş Bankası*, Turkey's first public bank, which was established in 1924. Although the original objective of the bank was to compete with foreign banks and the non-Muslim capitalists of Istanbul, it quickly became the first modern political pressure group of the Republic which served the needs of the national capitalists. Throughout this period this group supported the policies of regime regarding the restrictions of the rights of workers, and the prohibition of the establishment of trade unions, and other class-based associations.⁵⁵ Therefore it is fair to state that despite the economic progress achieved in this era, the lion's share of the profit was shared among the members of a small elite which enjoyed close connections with the ruling elite, while the economic situation of the masses did not differ from the late-Ottoman era and continued to be in dire straits. Additionally to the problems of the distribution of income among the citizens, another economic problem was the unsatisfactory level of industrialization. During the first phase of the single-party regime Turkey remained to be an agricultural country. Most of its population lived in the countryside and small towns. Heavy industry was virtually non-

⁵³ Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası*, p. 244.

⁵⁴ Hikmet Bila, *CHP: 1919-2009* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2008), pp. 51-54.

⁵⁵ For more information on this group, see Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi*, pp. 40-43.

existent. The relations between the ruling elite and the peasants were regulated through local notables and landowners who remained loyal to the Republican regime in exchange of the presentation of their interests in the ruling party, as well as the prohibition of the possibility of a land reform.⁵⁶ Another fact that contributed to the impoverishment of the masses was the enormous foreign debts inherited from the Ottoman Empire. A sizeable proportion of the budget was reserved for the payment of this debt.

This was the economic situation of the country when it was hit with the tidal waves of the Global Economic Crisis of 1929. The Great Depression triggered an economic crisis in Turkey, lowering the value of the sole Turkish export; agricultural goods. The crisis led to repercussions in other spheres of life. It intensified the widespread feelings of alienation of the people to the single-party rule, feelings that were derived from the monolithic political system, authoritarian attitudes of the regional and local party representatives, clientelism and corruption, and the government's disregard even for basic political rights. The modernizing reforms which were constantly clashing with the customs and traditions of the society also played a significant part in this alienation. In 1929, Mustafa Kemal took a tour of the country and witnessed both the anguish caused by the economic situation and the alienation of the masses. He found an elaborate solution to minimise the effects of these problems and decided to establish an opposition party whose objectives were to act as a buffer zone between the alienated masses and the government, and to be instrumental in relaxing the tense political environment by providing a safety valve for the growing discontent of the people.

Mustafa Kemal inspected the party programme himself, transferred the parliament members with Liberal tendencies to this new organization and appointed one of his closest friends, Ali Fethi Okyar as the head of the party. In July 1930, the end product of this process became the Liberal Republican Party, or LRP (*Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*),⁵⁷ an economically liberal mirror image of the ruling single party.

⁵⁶ Article 74 of the Constitution of 1924 stated that “without proving the public interest and paying the actual value of the expropriated property in advance, no land and property can be expropriated.” *Resmî Gazete*, No. 467 (April 20, 1924), Law No. 491, pp. 701-778.

⁵⁷ For more information on the Liberal Republican Party, see Cemil Koçak, *Belgelerle İktidar ve Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2006); Çetin Yetkin, *Atatürk'ün Başarısız Demokrasi Devrimi: Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (İstanbul: Toplumsal Dönüşüm Yayınları, 1997); and Cem Ermence, *99 Günlük Muhalefet: Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2006).

While being completely in peace with the secular ideals of the Republic, the new party favoured lower and progressive taxes, the abolition of the state monopolies and the increase of foreign capital (i.e., foreign loans and investment). Politically, it demanded greater freedom of expression, single-degree elections and greater political participation for women.

In accordance with Mustafa Kemal's predictions, after the establishment of a new party, the tense political atmosphere in the country relaxed, still he made a massive mistake in his calculations. Mustafa Kemal and other members of the ruling elite predicted that the new party would gain only limited support from the public. According to Koçak, the Republican People's Party leaders were so out of touch with the reality, they genuinely believed that the government should get ready to take necessary precautions to protect the Liberal Republican Party members from public outrage when they would start to criticize the government.⁵⁸ In reality, the response of the people to the new party was exceptional. In two weeks following the establishment of the opposition party, 13,000 people applied to join to the Liberals. According to the intelligence reports of the ruling party some of these new recruits were regarded as reactionaries who favoured "bringing back the old alphabet and wearing of *fez*, restoration of Ottoman dynasty, and reversal of all Kemalist reforms" although the leaders of the party continuously tried to prove their commitment to secularism at every chance; they even called the party, Liberal Secular Republican Party (*Serbest Layık Cumhuriyet Fırkası*), in their official writings and documents. Furthermore, the first article of the party programme guaranteed the party's devotion to secularism. In the whole programme, words such as "religion" and "belief" were not mentioned at all. The only statement made by the party concerning religion was the "freedom of conscience" which was mentioned as one of the basic principles of the party.⁵⁹

Although the artificial opposition party remained loyal to Mustafa Kemal, and directed their criticism mainly to the government, the unpredictable success of the party in the 1930 local elections must have made Kemal wary of the whole experiment. In the local elections of 1930, which would be the last competitive elections in Turkey until 1946, Liberal Republican Party came first in 40 of the 502 municipalities

⁵⁸ Koçak, *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası*, p. 82.

⁵⁹ For the Liberal Republican Party programme, see Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, pp. 423-425. For the party regulations, see *Serbest Cumhuriyet Fırkası* (Ed.), *Serbest Layık Cumhuriyet Fırkası'nın Yasası* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet, 1930).

including the city of Samsun, only two months after its establishment. Despite the oppression and intimidation, the Liberals won 26 percent of the votes in Istanbul, and 40 percent of the votes in Izmir. After the elections, Okyar claimed that his party had won in all constituencies, spoke out about the corruption of the electoral process in the assembly, listed the illegal activities occurred in the elections in detail and called for repeat elections.⁶⁰ Fearing that his experiment had gone well beyond its purpose, on November 16, 1930, Mustafa Kemal decided to withdraw his support and protection from the LRP; a decision which actually was an unofficial death warrant for the party. To avoid a clash with Mustafa Kemal, Okyar stepped down and was forced to close the Liberal Republican Party, only three months after its foundation.

During this temporary period of freedom in 1930, several other parties, both from the political right and left were founded or attempts were made to establish them, but they were either closed down or could not obtain permission to be established from the government.⁶¹ This trend continued until 1931 but a new opposition party similar to the LRP could not be established. Therefore, the Liberal Republican Party experiment became the last significant attempt at establishing a multi-party system during the single-party regime. After the violent incidents which occurred in Aegean town of Menemen on December 24, 1930, when a mob which was led allegedly by members of the *Nakshbandiyya* Sufi order attempted to incite a revolt and killed a young lieutenant and two municipal watchmen, the multi-party experience was finished for good. The government attempted to reveal the links between the perpetrators of these crimes and the Liberal Republican Party, although these attempts failed. Eventually, the government rounded up more than 2000 suspects; many of them were bystanders or citizens who had not been able to find the courage or means to intervene. Among the suspects were some former Progressive Republican Party supporters, as well. In total, 29 suspects were sentenced to death. The incidents were used by the ruling party to prove Liberals' link with Islamic reactionism thus legitimizing the demise of the opposition party. The Menemen incident was the last

⁶⁰ For Ali Fethi Okyar's allegations on the electoral fraud, see See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre III, Cilt 22, pp. 16-76.

⁶¹ For detailed inspection of these political parties, see Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, pp. 285-293.

nail in the coffin of the multi-party system; with it, hopes for a competitive democracy ended for good.⁶²

In the Third Grand Party Congress of 1931, the political regime of the Turkish Republic was officially announced as a single-party system. It was a crucial landmark for the republic because the plans for working in a multi-party system even with a meek, manageable opposition were renounced and an official authoritarian model took its place. Until the end of the Second World War not a single legal opposition group was allowed to participate in the political field. Similarly, the social sphere was cleared out of voluntary social organizations. At the same congress, the ideological framework of the regime was introduced with the principles called Six Arrows (*Altı Ok*) which were Republicanism, Populism, Secularism, Reformism, Nationalism and Statism.⁶³ This was a crucial moment, because until 1931, Republican elite had never a cohesive ideology. What gave impetus to their actions had been an amalgamation of attitudes and opinions. Therefore, instead of an ideology, the Republican doxa had always remained as an elastic, flexible notion. In May 1931, for the first time, this fusion of opinions was collected together in the form of six fundamental and inalterable principles, which forged the framework of the Republican ideology and after being incorporated into the constitution with the amendment of 1937; the same six principles determined the ideological boundaries of the Turkish Republic and denoted the basic and unchangeable characteristics of the Turkish state.⁶⁴

The Single-Party Ideology

Among the six principles which established the Republican ideology, *Reformism* denotes showing commitment and loyalty to the modernist reform agenda of the

⁶² In some Republican People's Party sources, the Menemen incident is cited as the reason for the closing of the Liberal Republican Party although the incident occurred after the dissolving of the party. For instance, the RPP propaganda material celebrating the 40th anniversary of the party states that "the perpetrators of these incidents were encouraged by the negative climate caused by the Liberal Republican Party". See Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Ed.), *CHP – Millet Hizmetinde 40 Yıl* (Ankara: Ankara, 1963), pp. 30-35.

⁶³ Section 2, Article 1 of the RPP Party Programme of 1931 stated that the "RPP is republican, nationalist, populist, statist, secular and revolutionary." Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, (Ed.) *CHP Nizamnamesi ve Programı, 1931* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1931), p. 31.

⁶⁴ With the amendment the second article of the constitution became "The state of Turkey is republican, nationalists, populist, statist, secular and revolutionary. For more information on the development and the legal stature of the Six Arrows, see Ergun Özbudun, "The Nature of the Kemalist Political Regime." Ali Kazancıgil & Ergun Özbudun (Ed.) *Atatürk: Founder of a Modern State* (London: C. Hurst, 1982).

Republican regime and protecting the acquisitions of these reforms at all costs. Although some contemporary commenters assigned a meaning of “constant change” and “the transformation of the society according to the needs of time” to this notion,⁶⁵ Republican Reformism strictly limited itself with the modernization agenda of the early-Republican era and did not possess a permanently transformative, renovating nature. On the contrary, since it commanded the preservation of the Republican reforms completed in 1920s and 1930s, Republican Reformism indicated a degree of staticity. Another principle, *Republicanism*, was defined in the party programme as the “preservation of the Republic, the only form of state which effectively implements the notion of national sovereignty at its fullest extent”⁶⁶ and was quickly embraced by the whole society except for a small minority who were still hoping for an Ottoman restoration.

Nationalism, perhaps the most significant core principle of the regime was described in the party programme as “not irredentist nor expansionist, but respectful to the other nations” and was used as the main instrument for establishing a national identity out of the multi-cultural Ottoman legacy. Republican Nationalism emphasized national unity and solidarity, had a mission to civilize and modernize the nation, refused class struggle, had only a cultural relation with Turks who remained out of boundaries of Turkey after the World War I, and, therefore had no irredentist claims.⁶⁷ Republican Nationalism was transformed through the process of nation-building before settling into an ethnicist form which utilized *Turkification*,⁶⁸ a form of assimilation, as its main instrument.

Populism principle was an inheritance of the Turkish War of Independence whose motto was “sovereignty belongs to the people”. During the early-Republican period its meaning started to further include governmental policies geared for the improvement of the life standards of the people. Karpas suggested that although a

⁶⁵ Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, *Kemalizm, Laiklik ve Demokrasi* (Ankara: Image, 1994), p. 50.

⁶⁶ *CHP Nizamnamesi ve Programı, 1931*, p. 30.

⁶⁷ For a brief summary of Republican nationalism, see Ahmet Yıldız, “Kemalist Milliyetçilik”, Ahmet İnsel (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce - Cilt 2: Kemalizm* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp. 200-225.

⁶⁸ The key concept of Republican nationalism, which means the “uncompromising exertion of Turkish ethnic identity’s authority over every aspect of social life including the language used in the streets, history taught in schools, education policies, economic life, trade, personnel recruitment regime, private law and locating of minorities to some regions.” Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve ‘Türkleştirme’ Politikaları* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), p. 101.

populist attitude was evident in the regime, it never led to the establishment of a social state, due to the symbiotic relations between the ruling party and the local notables, and the general opposition towards socialist ideas and values. Rather, the populism of the Republican elite indicated a classless society, which fits in with the aims of the party to establish a unified society and nation. The notion of social equality, which was a distinguishing feature of populism, was modified and reduced to the principle of equality before law.⁶⁹ Similarly for Tunçay, Republican Populism was more similar to the French revolution's anti-monarchism and dislike of status differences in the society. It disowned social classes and class struggle while approving of cohesion between professions. Therefore Republican populism was never expanded as an equalising or liberating principle but rather as a part of the nationalist tendencies of the Republican regime.⁷⁰ Zürcher concurringly stated that Populism was in essence nothing but anti-socialism since it promoted national solidarity and a classless society, and valued the interests of the nation above the interests of a specific class. Additionally to Republican Populism's dislike of class struggle and socialism, liberalism was interpreted as being equally harmful to the unity of the nation since it would imply the existence of social classes in society, which eventually would lead to conflict between classes. Therefore, in summary Republican Populism was the rejection of both the atomic individualism of liberalism and the existence of social classes.⁷¹ This assumption is further verified by the writings of Recep Peker,⁷² the longest-serving Secretary-General of the party which defined the Republican rule as a unique political system; a "third way" contrary both to liberalism which exploited the "masses of the nation" and socialism.

⁶⁹ Kemal Karpat, "The Republican People's Party, 1923-1945." Metin Heper & Jacob M. Landau (Eds.), *Political Parties and Democracy in Turkey* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1990), p. 55.

⁷⁰ Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, p. 215.

⁷¹ Taha Parla, *Türkiye'de Anayasalar* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2002), p. 31.

⁷² Recep Peker (1889-1950) was one of the longest serving secretary-generals of the RPP (1931-1935). As one of the main ideologues of the party his influence during 1930s was only surpassed by Atatürk and İnönü. Peker remained as a Parliament member from 1923 until his death and served as the Minister of Interior (1924-1925 and 1942-1943), Minister of Defence (1925-1927), Minister of Education (1929) and the Prime Minister (1946-1947). During his long stint as the secretary-general he tried to build a coherent philosophy for his party. He described the political system of Turkey as "third way" contrary both to liberalism and socialism. His world view was disseminated to the public, especially to youth, mainly through his "History of the Revolution" lectures, which in book form became compulsory reading in university and were transmitted to masses through radio. For more information on Peker, see Recep Peker, *İnkılâp Dersleri* (Ankara: Ulus, 1935).

Secularism, was a significant part of the modernization process of the Republican regime and can be read as one of the central concepts of the Republican identity. For the Republican elite, modernization which they equated with Westernization was the only solution to overcome the problems that led to the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The only way for Turkey to continue existing was modernizing as fast as possible and the most significant obstacles hindering this process were the values and traditions emanated from the past, specifically the Islamicate, “eastern” past. Therefore, the Republican reform agenda could easily be summarized as modernizing as fast as possible, and at any cost, in every sphere of life, such as the legal system, education, economy and industry to generate everlasting change in the traditional social order. These changes would have served the ultimate objective of altering both the look and the mind-set of the country for good, cutting off the ties with Eastern traditions and culture and firmly integrating Turkey into the Western civilization. Secularism was a key component of this policy.

Additionally, Secularism was quite useful because it was repeatedly utilised in the defence of the regime whenever a real or imaginary threat arose. It became one of the justifications of the single-party rule and for the restrictions imposed on the opposition, which were mostly defined to be religious or from Islamic origin and Islamic revivalist intent. After all, the existence of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) through which the state sponsored the official version of Islam, financed it, and regulated its services through the building and management of mosques, and the training of religious personnel shows that the party never approached this issue just as a matter of conscience or as the separation of the religious and political affairs.⁷³ The shaping of a new, modern, progressive version of Islam that would be cleansed of ‘superstitions’ and protected from the misuse of the people who had been abusing it for personal gain and could co-exist with a westernized state, was always a part of Republican agenda. Eventually, this plan became a double-edged sword both modernizing the face of the country beyond any previous attempts and leading to the alienation and discontent of the masses through the widening of the emotional gap between the Turkish society and the secular ruling class.

⁷³ Karpas, “The Republican People’s Party, 1923-1945.”, p. 53.

The last main principle of the party; *Statism* was the most discussed one among the party members. It was defined in the party programme of 1931 as “while taking individual enterprise as the basis [of the economy], the party wants to actively involve the state in those affairs where the higher and general interests of the nation are at play, notably in the economic domain, in order to ensure at the soonest the prosperity of the nation and the development of the country.”⁷⁴ This announcement was a reflection of the interventionist economic policies which became the norm in the world, subsequent to the recent global economic crisis. In this period two rival groups were formed within the party, the Statists, who were led by Prime Minister İnönü and Secretary-General Peker and favoured statism with all of its economic, politic and social implications and the Liberals, who were led by Celâl Bayar.⁷⁵ Peker, who became the secretary-general in 1931, was a statist who represented the totalitarian tendencies in the party. After the failure of the Liberal Republican Party experiment, he became the driving force of the Republican ideology. According to Tunçay he was “determining the official party line.”⁷⁶ Following his appointment the line of separation between the state and the party became even blurrier. Peker remained in that position for five years, becoming the longest serving bureaucrat in the general-secretary position and without a doubt left his mark on the party. From Peker’s standpoint, notions of liberalism and freedom were open to misuse, which had brought mankind to the brink of a destructive era of anarchy. Freedom of thought and expression had weakened the state. Liberal economic politics also “created” the proletariat, as a potential harmful social class. For Peker, the liberal state was doomed. It would be replaced by the “nation-state.” His world view was disseminated to the public, especially to youth, through the Peoples’

⁷⁴ *CHP Nizamnamesi ve Programı, 1931*, p. 33.

⁷⁵ Mahmut Celâl Bayar (1883-1986) was one of the most prominent Republican politicians whose active political career covered almost 80 years of Turkish politics, stretching from the late-Ottoman era over to the modern period. Bayar started his political activities in the Committee of Union and Progress and became an influential name in the Aegean branch of the organization. During the Greek invasion of the same area he organized the local resistance against the occupation forces before joining to the national movement in Ankara as a parliament member. During the Republican era he established *İş Bankası* with the orders of Atatürk in 1924 and became the first general manager of this institution. From 1932 to 1937, he acted as the Minister of Economy. In 1937, Atatürk appointed him as the Prime Minister. After Atatürk’s death in 1938, during the rule of the new President İnönü, Bayar was removed from the top echelons of power. In 1946, he resigned from the Republican People’s Party and established Democratic Party (*Demokrat Parti*) which became the new ruling party of Turkey in 1950, following the transition to multi-party democracy. On the same year he was elected as the President of Turkey, an office which he held until the military coup of 1960. Following the coup, Bayar remained in prison until 1964. After his release he remained as one of the leading figures of the Liberal and Centre-Right parties of Turkish politics. For more information on Bayar, see his autobiography, Celâl Bayar, *Ben de Yazdım* (Istanbul: Baha Matbaası, 1967).

⁷⁶ Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti*, p. 295.

Houses (*Halkevleri*)⁷⁷ and his “History of the Revolution” lectures, which in book form became compulsory reading in university and were transmitted to the masses through radio.

On the other side of the debate there were Liberals who were critical of the over-monitoring of the economic sphere by the state were gathered around *İş Bankası*. Although being a sizeable pressure group, the political influence was restricted on protecting the members of the propertied classes from the restrictions on the economic liberties which were caused by the over-monitoring of the economy by the state. The speaker of this group Bayar was appointed to the Ministry of Economy in 1932, an office he continued to hold in 1937. In that time, *İş Bankası* controlled 38 per cent of the general deposit of all of the national banks. Its thirteen board members all were members of parliament.⁷⁸

Due to influence of the Liberals in the economic sphere, the nature of the *Statism* in Turkey is debated among the scholars. Most scholars and the party publishing itself, do not associate Republican statism with socialism and claim that the switch to a statist economic model is a product of a combination of international and local causes. It is evident, that the international developments, especially the Great Depression of 1929, had substantial influence on the transition from liberalism to statism as the liberal trend in the world economy was reversed. Right after the Great Depression, the Republican elite decided to take a series of measures to ensure the regulation of the economy and foreign trade by the state, to prevent the economy from the harm inflicted by the self-centred attitudes of the national bourgeoisie and the effects of the international economic crisis. Due to the depression, consumption rates and the level of income dropped sharply in Turkey. As a natural defence reflex, protectionist measures against imports were taken to limit the effects of the depression through implementing isolationist policies. People were encouraged to consume domestic products, which successfully caused a sharp decline in the amount of imports. The supervision of foreign trade and foreign exchange regime was completed in the

⁷⁷ People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*) were educational institutions that were directly controlled by the single-party. They were founded in 1932. According to the party publications, the objective of these institutions was “to keep alive and develop further the movement of reform and social progress in the country”. These institutions are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

⁷⁸ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, p. 136.

period between 1929 and 1931. On August 30, 1930, Prime Minister İnönü declared that the party was only “moderately statist” on economic affairs.⁷⁹

For most scholars, who took cue from İnönü, statism in Turkey was rather a form of liberalism in which the state gave itself the responsibility of the regulation of the economy. For instance, Keyder defines Republican Statism as nothing but “combining of the forces of the political elite and the developing bourgeoisie for accumulating wealth quickly.”⁸⁰ Similarly, according to İsmail Cem, the Republican economic policy was nothing more than “liberal economic policies in the shape of Statism.” Cem further states that the main objectives of the statist policies were to develop the country through the personal enrichment of individuals and to replace the non-Muslim entrepreneurs with Muslim ones. This approach is evident in economic rhetoric of the Republican elite, which attributed significant importance to the influence of “millionaires” on the development of the country.⁸¹ From this point of view, all of the acts of statism; the planning, nationalisation of the foreign firms and the increase of state investments were performed to make things easier for the Turkish private sector.⁸²

In summary, in Republican statism, the state continued being the hegemonic power in economic life as the chief investor, operator and supervisor but private enterprises were continued to be encouraged. The end product proved to be successful. Turkish industry would never again reach the rates of growth accomplished between 1930 and 1939. Between these years the average of growth rate was 10.3 percent⁸³ but the growth did not contribute to the life standards of the masses because associated with the development of industry, capitalistic exploitation increased proportionately. In the period of 1934-1938, the real wages of proletariat dropped 25 percent.⁸⁴ In 1932 all of the workers of Istanbul were fingerprinted for surveillance. In 1936, the conservative Strike Law of 1909 (*Tatil-i İşgal Kanunu*), which had been accepted after

⁷⁹ “İsmet Paşa Hazretleri Tenkitlere Müdellel Cevaplar Verdi.” *Akşam*, September 1, 1930, p. 7.

⁸⁰ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, p. 137.

⁸¹ İsmail Cem, *Türkiye’de Geri Kalmışlığın Tarihi* (Istanbul: Can, 1997 [1970]), p. 262.

⁸² On the other hand, some scholars, including Korkut Boratav discussed the probable ideological aspects of the Republican Statism. Boratav pointed out that the introduction part of the announcement of the first five-year plan can only be described as “Proto-dependency theory” or “Proto-third-worldism.” See Boratav, *Türkiye İktisat Tarihi*, p. 66.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁸⁴ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, pp. 133-134.

the 1908 strikes by the Ottoman Assembly, was replaced by a new Labour Law, which was based on the Industrial Law of Fascist Italy.

The exploitation of the proletariat was legitimized on a principle of the party programme, which came right after the six principles. This principle was *Corporatism*. Corporatism, a third way between capitalism and socialism which free market and central planning go together, was a part of the Italian Fascist experiment. In corporatism, “business and labour are bound together in an organic unified whole, social classes do not conflict with one other but work in harmony for the common good and the national interest.”⁸⁵ According to the Republican People’s Party programme of 1931 the nation was “not composed of different classes but composed of people from various professions” which were integrated with each other and were complementary parts of a harmonious social organism. Article 14 of the programme stated that the cohesion between professions was “one of the essential principles” of the party.⁸⁶ In the following paragraph these professions were listed as small landowners, owners of small enterprises and trades-people, labourers and workers, freelancers, and industrialists, businessmen, and large landowners. The party promoted social harmony and order between these occupational groups instead of class struggle. In accordance with this principle, with the Association Law (*Cemiyetler Kanunu*) of 1938 establishing organizations based on class principals became forbidden in Turkey, and class-based freedom of association would be allowed only after the end of the single-party rule.⁸⁷

The corporatism principle of the Republican elite, speaks volumes on the Turkish society envisaged by them. For the Republican People’s Party, ‘the people’ was a notion equal to an amalgamation of different layers of society who would work together for the priorities set by the regime; the establishment of a national unity and the modernisation of the country by following the Western example. Like every other sense of belongingness and identities, belonging to a class was forbidden. Therefore proletariat movements which were perceived as disruptive to the national harmony were perceived as illegitimate for Republicans as every other voluntary political and social organizations such as Sufi religious orders, or political parties. According to

⁸⁵ Andrew Heywood, *Political Ideologies* (New York: Palgrave, 1998), p. 184.

⁸⁶ *CHP Nizamnamesi ve Programı, 1931*, p. 31.

⁸⁷ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 83.

Kışlalı, one of the prominent supporters of Republican ideology, since “classes in modern sense were not present in Turkey” during the Republican era, the government tried to prevent their emergence which could cause problems in the future due to the possibility of the emergence of social cleavages between these classes.⁸⁸ This claim which completely ignores the existence of the social classes in Turkey in 1930s is a telling example of the general attitude of the regime towards the diversity of identity within Turkish society. The whole ‘Six Arrows’, additionally to the seventh main principle, Corporatism, geared towards establishing a coherent, monolith of a society undivided by class-struggle, religious and denominational differences, different lifestyle choices, diverse linguistic and ethnic identities, and ideological currents; a society which was summarized by the secretary-general Peker as “a national bloc”.⁸⁹ After the acceptance of the ‘Six Arrows’ at the Third Grand Party Congress, the rest of the 1930s witnessed the implementation of the Republican programme of establishing a homogenous, modern, national, ‘ideal community’.

Single-Party Rule of 1930s

Following the consolidation of power and the establishment of the ideological framework of the regime, the single-party started to more aggressively shape the political, social and cultural spheres and actively tried to mould a uniform national identity for the citizens. After the Grand Party Congress of 1931, the party expanded its organisation geographically and recruited large numbers of additional members to numerous new branches. It sought to use the party organization “to mobilize and educate the population for the internalization of the reforms”.⁹⁰ The modernizing reforms targeting the visibility of Islam also intensified in this era. Among these reforms the most controversial step was taken in 1932. The *ezan*, or call to prayer which traditionally had been in its original language, Arabic, throughout the Islamic world was supplanted by a Turkish call to prayer. Similarly to the translation of the Quran into Turkish, this change was carried out to modernize Turkish Islam, but it had a further agenda, as well. The Turkification of the call to prayer was to contribute to

⁸⁸ Kışlalı, *Kemalizm, Laiklik ve Demokrasi*, pp. 40-41.

⁸⁹ Recep Peker, “1935 CHP Programının Açıklaması.” Taha Parla (Ed.), *Türkiye’de Siyasi Kültürün Resmi Kaynakları: Cilt 3* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1992), pp. 124-138.

⁹⁰ Karpas, “The Republican People’s Party, 1923-1945.”, p. 52.

the nationalisation of Islam, and for cutting Turkish Muslims' ties with rest of the Islamic world.

The ideological containment of society continued with the merging of every independent and semi-independent social and political organisation with the party. After 1931 all independent social and cultural organizations were absorbed by the Republican People's Party and the party started to control cultural and intellectual life directly. Among these organizations the most important ones were the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*) and Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*) which further restrained the people's ability of expressing their identities. Turkish Women's Union had emerged out of the organic feminist movement that existed in Turkey even before the establishment of the Turkish Republic following the almost synchronous proliferation of the women's rights movements across the whole Middle East in the beginning of the 20th century.⁹¹ Feminists in Turkey, although being modest in numbers, became politically active and ideologically conscious enough to try establishing a feminist political party in 1923, by the name of the People's Party of Women (*Kadınlar Halk Fırkası*). The government did not accept this appeal on the grounds of that women were not legally allowed to participate in politics but it allowed the formation of a civil society organization called Turkish Women's Union. The Union remained active in pursuing political rights for the women and wanted to nominate well-known female figures of the era, such as the leader of the union Nezihe Muhiddin and famous author Halide Edip, as candidates in the 1925 elections, but this proposal was also refused by the ruling party on the same grounds. In 1930s, after the call for reforms from the feminist movement and the modernist agenda of the ruling party came to a fruitful cooperation, women of Turkey finally gained the right to vote and to hold office.⁹² Simultaneously with this victory, the Union was forced to becoming a state-sponsored association and the feminist movement had lost its radical reformist edge. The disintegration of the organic Turkish feminist movement was concluded in 1935 when the Turkish Women's Union was closed by the government

⁹¹ For a brief history of these movements see Ellen L. Fleischmann, "The "Other Awakening": The Emergence of Women's Movements in the Modern Middle East, 1900-1940." Margaret L. Meriwether & Judith E. Tucker (Eds.), *Social History of Women and Gender in the Modern Middle East* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1999), pp. 89-139.

⁹² Women gained the right to vote in 1930 and the right to be elected in 1934. In 1935, eighteen women were elected to the parliament of 400 seats. This ratio of female parliamentary representation could only be surpassed after 2007 elections in Turkey.

on the grounds that it had “completed its task”. Later, at the Fourth Grand Party Congress which was held in May 1935, forming feminist social organizations become prohibited.⁹³

The fate of the Turkish Hearths followed a similar pattern. Turkish Hearths had been established in 1912, in the relatively free environment of the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire with a modernist, pan-Turkist worldview. For years, the Hearths had remained as the main organisation for the conceptualisation of Turkish nationalism. During the War of Independence, they had joined the nationalist camp. Initially, the Hearths had reflected the concept of a historical-religious sense of nationhood which was contrary to Atatürk’s own secular version of nationhood. After the establishment of the Republic, the official, Republican version of nationalism slowly replaced that of the Hearths. In 1927, they were categorised as “establishments under government supervision” before being closed down permanently in 1931. At that time, they were the largest voluntary organization in Turkey with 267 centres and 32.000 registered members.⁹⁴ Atatürk justified the closing of these institutions as “gathering similar forces together and moving to same direction to reach the definite goals”.⁹⁵ Along with these state-sponsored organizations, other non-governmental organizations such as the Masonic Lodges were closed as well on the premise of “being connected to foreign powers or interests”.⁹⁶ Since the formation of class-based associations was already forbidden,

⁹³ Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, (Ed.) *CHP Programı, 1935* (Ankara: TBMM Press, 1935), p. 49.

⁹⁴ Füsün Üstel, “Türk Ocakları.” Tanıl Bora (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce - Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002), pp. 263-266. For more information on the history of the Hearths, see Füsün Üstel, *İmparatorluktan Ulus Devlete Türk Milliyetçiliği: Türk Ocakları, 1912–1921* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1997).

⁹⁵ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk’ün Söylev ve Demeçleri III* (Ankara: AAM, 2006 [1961]), p. 130.

⁹⁶ The closing of the Masonic Lodges is generally attributed to the Article 69 of the RPP Party Programme of 1935 which forbade the establishment of organizations that are “connected to foreign powers and interests”. For an example of this perspective see Hakkı Uyar, “Atatürk Dönemi İç Politikası (1920-1938).” Süleyman İnan & Ercan Haytoğlu (Eds.), *Yakın Dönem Türk Politik Tarihi* (Ankara: Anı, 2006), pp. 58-62. Additionally, it is widely reported that some political dissidents including Refet Bele, an important figure of the War of Independence and an influential actor of the opposition against Atatürk, were Freemasons. If the rumour is true, the closing of the lodges may be motivated by the determination of the regime to deprive the opposition members of a medium where they can meet and “conspire” against the regime. The ban on Masonic lodges can be also perceived as a part of a general trend in the authoritarian states. All Masonic lodges in Germany were abolished in 1934, Italian ones were closed in 1925. Furthermore, in Germany, freemasons were banned from working in civil service. Freemasonry was outlawed in other authoritarian states as well, including Spain and Hungary. For a brief summary of the early development of Freemasonry in Turkey, see Paul Dumont, “Freemasonry in Turkey: A By-product of Western Penetration.” *European Review*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (July 2005), pp. 481-493.

one can argue that showing collective loyalty to religion, ethnicity, gender, ideology or class was not permitted during this era.

The authoritarian Republican regime also strictly regulated the press which made it impossible for a non-party member publisher to survive in the business. According to the Press Law of 1931 (*Matbuat Kanunu*), people who had been sentenced for being against the War of Independence, Republic and the reforms (Article 12-I), and journalists who had supported the Allied forces during the national struggle (Article 12-K) were banned from owning and publishing newspapers and periodicals. Publishing pro-sultanate, pro-caliphate, pro-communist and pro-anarchist publications was forbidden by Article 40. Another article imposed fines on publications which “dealt wrongly with national history,” thus allowing only the official version of the recent events to be printed. The government also had the right to close any publication permanently according to the Article 50 of the above-mentioned law if they “published articles against the general policies of the country”.⁹⁷ With this vaguely defined term, the publishing of virtually any anti-regime material became punishable. In 1938 further amendments to the Press Law restricted the publishing of the newspapers and periodicals only to the publishers who had obtained permission from the government or the local authorities.⁹⁸ With this article, only newspaper owners who were part of the Republican ruling elite⁹⁹ survived while political opposition, especially dissidents who gained notoriety for writing against the party politics, were banned indefinitely from publishing. Peker justified the state-censorship in Turkey with these words: “There is freedom of press in our country, but the government had every right to intervene when it sees treason in the press.”¹⁰⁰ Of course, the definition of treason was extremely broad in early Republican Turkey, and the press freedom that Peker mentioned was reduced to propaganda that glorified the ideals of the regime and its leaders.

⁹⁷ For the text of the laws, see *Resmi Gazete*, No. 1867 (June 25, 1931), Law No. 1881, pp. 365-378. For a detailed review of the law, see Nurşen Mazıcı, “1930’a kadar Basının Durumu ve 1931 Matbuat Kanunu.” *Atatürk Yolu Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılap Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi* 18 (1998), pp. 133-154.

⁹⁸ *Resmi Gazete*, No. 3960 (July 15, 1938), Law No. 3518, pp. 1105-1106.

⁹⁹ Yunus Nadi the owner of *Cumhuriyet*, Asım Us the owner of *Vakit*, and Hüseyin Cahit Yalçın the owner of *Tanin* were all members of the parliament from the ruling party.

¹⁰⁰ Recep Peker, “Disiplinli Hürriyet.” *Ülkü – Halkevleri Mecmuası*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (April 1933), pp. 177-180.

The encirclement of the society continued in the fields of education and science. The scientific community was ideologically surrounded by the ‘Twin Theses’; Thesis of Turkish History (*Türk Tarih Tezi*) which was proposed by the Turkish Historical Society in July 1932, and The Sun-Language Theory (*Güneş Dil Teorisi*) which was prepared by the Linguistic Society in August, 1936. According to Thesis of Turkish History, human civilization came to existence in Central Asia, and several millennia ago due to a drought in their homeland the Turks of Central Asia had been scattered to every corner of the world to create high civilizations. The Sumerians, Hittites, and Trojans of Anatolia and Mesopotamia were Turkish in essence. In fact, there was not a single civilization or empire that had not been established by proto-Turks. Even the Greek, Egyptian, Roman, Hindu, Mayan and Chinese civilizations were Turkish.

Similarly, the Sun-Language Theory suggested that all languages of the world were derived from a basic language of Central Asia.¹⁰¹ According to the Turkish Linguistic Society, this language was proto-Turkish, thus all languages in the world which originated from this source were variations of Turkish. The methodology used by the Society to prove the theory was nothing but *goropism* and was far away from scientific. Even the tiniest phonetic resemblance between a Turkish and foreign word was exploited to declare that that foreign language originated from Turkish. For instance, it was claimed that the word “diablo” was Turkish because it sounds like an obscure Turkish word, *devoğlu*, which means “son of a giant”. Both of these theories were the brainchildren of Mustafa Kemal¹⁰² and they immensely contributed to the Republican ideology by contributing to the nationalist mythology and by cutting Turkey’s ties from the Islamic history and Islamicate culture.

It was difficult to remain at the academy without supporting these theories. For instance prominent historian Zeki Velidi Togan specifically criticized the idea that the explanation of the supposed Turkish migration from Central Asia due to drought as too simplistic. Despite his measured critique against the thesis and his prominent stature in academia, he felt that he would be harassed by others and decided to move

¹⁰¹ Ahmet Yıldız, “Kemalist Milliyetçilik,” p. 229.

¹⁰² To support the Sun-Language Theory Atatürk wrote daily columns for Ulus newspaper for a month. For Atatürk’s articles see *Ulus*, No. 5125-5146 (November 1935). For more information on the contribution of Atatürk to the Sun-Language Theory see his handwritten notes at Genelkurmay Başkanlığı (Ed.), *Atatürk’ün Dil Yazıları I: Sözlük Çalışmaları* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 2011).

to Vienna in 1932.¹⁰³ Along with the scientific encirclement of the academia, there were also political boundaries which shaped the educational sphere. With the university reform of August 1933, the *Dariülfünun*, the first modern university of the Ottoman Empire was closed, and re-opened as Istanbul University. During this transition two-thirds of the teaching staff of the university which were seen by the party as ‘unsuitable’ were made redundant. Among these names were academics that had acted reservedly during the establishment of the republic, and did not support, contribute to or openly criticised the official policies of the ruling party and the newly accepted theories on science. For instance, Ismail Hakkı Balatacioğlu, an academic of the Istanbul University and head of the Istanbul branch of Liberal Republican Party was made redundant during the reform which suggests that the university reforms had political motivations.¹⁰⁴

During this era, new educational institutions were introduced, as well. These were People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*) which were established in 1932 and, in People’s Chambers (*Halkodaları*) which were established in 1939; the educational institutions that were directly controlled by the single-party. Houses were opened across the country and replaced the Turkish Hearths which were closed in 1931, as the most significant “voluntary” social organizations.¹⁰⁵ According to the party publications, the objective of these institutions was “to keep alive and develop further the movement of reform and social progress in the country”. People’s Houses were located at large towns. In every People’s House there was a library, a reading room, a conference hall, a radio room, and a performance hall, while the People’s Chambers, the smaller versions of the People’s Houses, were located at the villages and small towns, and were more compact in size and limited in resources. Both of these institutions were

¹⁰³ Togan taught in prominent universities in Austria and Germany until his return to Turkey in 1939. He later criticized the thesis by stating that “history should not be the goal itself but it should be the means to gain knowledge ... Therefore distorting history to serve whichever sacred mission would be not just deceiving myself but also my readers, too. This was the opinion that I have defended in the History Congress. According to my opinion, only truth and true history would serve the nation...” For more information, see Zeki Velidi Togan, *Tarihte Usul* (Istanbul: Enderun, 1981), p. 118, and Nadir Özbek, “Zeki Velidi Togan ve ‘Türk Tarih Tezi’.” *Toplumsal Tarih*, Vol. 8, No. 45 (September 1997), pp. 15-23.

¹⁰⁴ Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti*, p. 90.

¹⁰⁵ On paper, participation to the activities of the People’s Houses was voluntary, yet several documents in the Prime Ministerial Archives show that for civil servants, such as teachers, participation was “strongly advised by the government”, in fact orders were sent to several ministries to encourage their members to continue participating in the activities of the Houses. See, BCA: No. 13178, File: 14-62, 30...18.1.2/ 30.55...15.

providing an elaborate form of supplementary education and adult education for the masses by building large libraries, staging plays and concerts, and opening exhibitions. With Houses in large towns and Chambers in villages, the masses that fell outside the formal education system of the state were asked to internalize the modernizing reforms. With the invention of the theses of history and language, the reforms on education, and the establishment of new educational institutions, the Republican regime ensured ideological uniformity at the field of education.

After the destruction of the opposition, the closing of the voluntary social organizations and the ideological encirclement of the society through the educational institutions, the zenith of the single-party rule arrived in the shape of the party-state merger of 1936. The foreshocks of this momentous event were evident in the fourth party programme of 1935. Article 61 of the programme referred to the need for the “establishment of an immovable government authority to protect the legacy of the revolution, the security of the citizens, the national order, laws and regulations”.¹⁰⁶ Since at that time there was no apparent threat to the security of the aforementioned notions, this article was a messenger of the future policies on further limitations in the political and social spheres. After almost a year of preparation, with a circular letter issued on June 18, 1936, the party-state merger was announced with these words: “For enabling the materialization of the objectives set by the party and for maintaining and hastening the expansion of the party, a closer cooperation between the party and the government will be secured.”¹⁰⁷ With this announcement, the Republican People’s Party was merged with the state.

The merger dictated that the positions held by the party officials would be taken over by representatives in the government. For example, the Minister of Interior would become the secretary-general of the party. At that time, Atatürk’s right hand man, Şükrü Kaya, was filling that position; therefore he became the secretary-general as well, replacing Peker, who was removed from his post by Atatürk three days before the decision of the merger, after five years of uninterrupted service. Inspector-Generals¹⁰⁸ of the state started to supervise party activities and the party organization

¹⁰⁶ *CHP Programı, 1931*, pp. 47-48.

¹⁰⁷ BCA: 81..12.0.0/ 1.80..1./1325-1.

¹⁰⁸ Inspectorships were established in 1923 to maintain Republican People’s Party centre’s strict control over the party organisation. Each region of the republic, which was composed from the incorporation of several cities, had one inspector. On the question of party hierarchy, inspectors ranked higher than

as well. Governors who had worked under the control of the Interior Ministry became the heads of the local branches of the party. Before the announcement of the merger, some of the local branches were electing their chairmen from their constituencies after a democratic election process. After the merger their positions were taken over by the appointed governors. Furthermore, since most of the local chairmen also acted as head of the People House's in their regions, these positions also were taken by the governors. As a result of these changes, the state penetrated every organ of the party.

Koçak claims that in this merger, the state was the stronger component. It was the party which was "swallowed by the state". Similarly Demirel, used the same metaphor to describe the merger.¹⁰⁹ This move was the last step in a process that gradually eliminated every element of the opposition in the political sphere. The first step was to liquefy all opposition inside the party. This was followed by the elimination of every single opposition outside the party whether organic, such as Progressive Republican Party, or fabricated such Liberal Republican Party, and whether right-wing or left-wing. The third step was the absorption of every independent organization, such as the Turkish Hearths and the Turkish Women's Union. Eventually even the instruments of the Republican People's Party were perceived as a threat to the total state authority and the party was forced to dissolve within the state. For Oran, the merger especially targeted the local notables who ran the local branches of the party.¹¹⁰ With the merger the relative autonomy of the party, the local branches, chairmen of the local branches and general-secretary were reduced to minimum which supports the thesis of that no political presence outside the government was permissible for the Republican regime. Since even the local branches of the party where at least some sort of political participation was allowed were taken over by the state, this setup created all sorts of problems for the state. Even the official complaints of the people could not be registered because all offices were controlled

provincial chairmen; in fact they were the top administrators of their regions. They were authorised to check the accounts of local branches, to approve or disapprove the candidates who wanted to participate in the administrative bodies of every political, social, economic and cultural institution, to check the election results of the local party congresses, even to force a recount if they considered it necessary. The notifications of the general inspector had to be implemented by every branch of the party in that region. Inspectors were the most effective tools of the party centre for controlling every branch of the party, although their power started to diminish after 1931. For more information on the Inspectorships, see Cemil Koçak, *Geçmişiniz İtinayla Temizlenir* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2009), pp. 129-173.

¹⁰⁹ Ahmet Demirel, "1930'larda Devlet CHP'yi de Yuttu." *Taraf*, December 22, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Baskın Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği – Resmi İdeoloji Dışı Bir İnceleme* (Istanbul: Bilgi, 1999 [1988]), pp. 41-50.

by the same officials. This was the nadir of political pluralism in early Republican Turkey. To complete the party-state merger, the main principles of the party were incorporated into the constitution with the constitutional amendment of 1937. With the amendment the second article of the constitution became “The state of Turkey is republican, nationalists, populist, statist, secular and revolutionary” and the ideology of the Republican ruling elite became the unchangeable ideology of the Turkish Republic. From 1937 to 1945, there was nothing except the state in the political, social, and cultural spheres in Turkey. Yet, the nature of this state organization is not sufficiently studied by the social scientists.

The Historiography of the Early-Republican Era and the Statement of the Problematic

Despite the authoritarianism of the era is apparent, and many aspects of the regime make it a unique form of authoritarianism, there are not many studies covering the entire single-party experience.¹¹¹ There are several reasons for it, first of all being the popularity of other subjects relating to the history of Turkey. Since 1950s, the perceived success of the democratization process in Turkey and the dynamics between the military and civil politicians remained as the main issue of debate for the social scientists and historians that specialize on Turkish modern history. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, nationalism arrived as the freshly significant topic and working on issues such as Turkish nationalism, the creation of a Turkish identity out of the ashes of a multinational Ottoman empire and the Kurdish question as its natural consequence became new trends in social sciences, but these were replaced quickly after 9/11. Will Turkey, a modern country with Islamic culture, and after 2001, with a government with Islamist tendencies, ever be able to find a balance between modernity, democracy and Islam, became the new popular subject. Based upon this

¹¹¹ Some of the prominent studies of the single-party era are: Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti Yönetiminin Kurulması, 1923-1931* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1981); Çetin Yetkin, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti Yönetimi, 1930-1945* (İstanbul: Altın Kitaplar, 1983); Hakkı Uyar, *Tek Parti Dönemi ve Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (İstanbul: Boyut, 2012 [1999]); Nurşen Mazıcı, *Tek Parti Dönemi* (İstanbul: Pozitif, 2011), Cemil Koçak, *Türkiye’de Milli Şef Dönemi, 1938-1945* (Ankara: Yurt Yayınları, 1985) and Stefan Plaggenborg, *Ordnung und Gewalt: Kemalismus, Faschismus, Sozialismus* (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschafts Verlag, 2012).

perception, one can clearly point out, that the single-party years of Turkish Republic, were never given enough attention and importance that they rightfully deserve.

There are only a handful of works that focus on the ideology of single-party regime and although being highly valuable they are not without their problems. Mete Tunçay's monumental work on the single-party era only focuses on the formative years of the regime and covers the period until 1931; the year of the intensification of the authoritarian attitudes of the regime. Similarly, Cemil Koçak's writings do focus on the period between 1938 and 1945 thus they do not examine the reign of Atatürk. Çetin Yetkin's work covers the entire era, but leaves out many significant events, such as the massacres of Dersim where more than ten thousand citizens were murdered by the state forces in 1938, either due to ideological concerns or to state oppression on the academia during the period in which Yetkin's work was published. Hakkı Uyar's work is another prominent study of the era but it does relate the history of the Turkish single-party to other single-party experiences or to the voluminous recent literature on authoritarianism, fascism and political religions. Finally, Stefan Plaggenborg's comparative study of the Republican regime, Fascist Italy and Soviet Union is a much welcomed and valuable addition to the literature on the Turkish single-party experience, since it extensively deals with the totalitarian attitudes of the regime, but unfortunately this study suffers from a very limited engagement with the primary sources and over-reliance to secondary sources and memoirs. Additionally, although the scope of the work is very impressive, similarly to the aforementioned studies, the information on Dersim massacres is quite limited. Other historians focused on several specific aspects and moments of the single-party years, such as the rights of the minorities in the early-Republican era, or the foreign policy of the era, and managed to inspect their topics brilliantly but these works do not sufficiently describe the underlying leitmotifs of Turkish single-party regime. Therefore it is fair to say that this important era of Turkish history is not studied sufficiently by the social scientists.

Another problem with the historiography of the era derives from the common misapprehensions about the single-party era. The most popular of these is the 'democratic intent theory'. For many historians and political scientists writing after the transition to democracy, Turkish authoritarianism was a 'successful' single-party system which was established with 'democratic intentions' from the start and fulfilled its responsibility and destiny by completing the transition to the multi-party system.

In short, the single-party period was a “necessary and temporary period of authoritarianism to eventually reach to democracy”.¹¹² Unlike other authoritarian regimes, the Republican ideology managed to survive the Second World War, participated in the transformation process of the Turkish political system into pluralism and still exists in Turkey in various forms. Due to that difference, its subscribers found the chance to revise the contents and even the historical background of their ideology. This trend was followed by social scientists who described the single-party era as a transitional period to pluralistic democracy.

The thesis on the democratic intent of the regime started around the closure of the Second World War and was promoted by the regime itself. Right after an Allied victory was sighted on the horizon, İnönü, who became the leader of Turkey after the death of Atatürk in 1938 with the title of National Chief (*Milli Şef*), and started to use a democratic rhetoric after moving away from the German sphere of influence, made comments about, maturing the rule of the people, as if the party had been trying to prepare the people for a democratic regime all along. The Republican leaders started to claim that the authoritarian rule of the single-party was a necessity. For them, authoritarianism was not a matter of choice, but it was unavoidable because of the “mind-set of the middle-ages” that was still prominent in the country, the republic should be protected against reactionary movements, and it was impossible to realize crucial reforms in a democratic regime because the cultural level of the country was underdeveloped compared to that of the European democracies.¹¹³ According to the party, once overcoming these problems, the authoritarian rule would be dismantled piece-by-piece. If the single-party era is examined, it can be seen that there was always a good reason for ‘postponing’ the transition period. For example, according to Republican People’s Party sources, in 1925 the multi-party system had been brought to an end and the rights of expression and association of the people were prohibited due to the Sheikh Said Revolt. Of course, this method of justification does not clarify why a worker in Istanbul was stripped from his basic political rights such as joining to a trade union or to a class-based political movement due to a reactionary-nationalist revolt which had erupted hundreds of kilometres away.

¹¹² For the most prominent supporters of this thesis, see Tarık Zafer Tunaya, *Siyasi Kurumlar ve Anayasa Hukuku* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Hukuk Fakültesi Yayınları, 1980) and Ahmet Taner Kışlalı, *Kemalizm, Laiklik ve Demokrasi* (Ankara: Image, 1994).

¹¹³ *CHP - Millet Hizmetinde 40 Yıl*, p. 36.

Tarik Zafer Tunaya introduced the term “Tutelage Party” to explain this – hypothetical – transitional period. He suggested that in underdeveloped countries, “some parties announced that they are temporary, and they are building a bridge to a more democratic and modern society.” He added that “in these systems although there is no formal restriction in the constitution for the establishment of other parties and practising some freedoms, these freedoms could not be enjoyed and parties could not be formed.” Tunaya also stated that although “a de-facto single party regime without any substantial legal background would be established” this regime is temporary since the “tutelage party forms its own end through establishing a democratic system.” For Tunaya, the Republican People’s Party was a tutelage party which was established with the idea of a multi-party system in mind.¹¹⁴ Similarly, Suna Kili stated that the single-party regime did not allow other parties “initially” on the basis of that the “Republican People’s Party would represent the whole of the nation”. Furthermore, she claimed although being authoritarian in appearance, the single-party system favoured a pluralist society and continued to praise the regime for preparing the necessary settings for the transformation from an authoritarian society to a pluralist one, and eventually, from a single-party system to a multi-party system.¹¹⁵

Similarly to the aforementioned scholars, Maurice Duverger signified the importance of the tutelary character of the Turkish single-party experiment by presenting it as a model for other Asian countries. He stated that trying to implement a pluralist democracy without a transition period in “traditional countries with uneducated masses” only plays into the hands of the educated and wealthy aristocracy, thus strengthening their rule and failing to establish a true democracy. On the other hand, a prudently executed single-party rule could led the way for the emergence of a new ruling class and an independent political elite, thus fulfilling the promise of establishing a democracy.¹¹⁶ İsmet Giritli agrees with Duverger and claims that the single-party regime of Turkey was neither a dictatorship nor a totalitarian regime although it showed “some authoritarian tendencies”. Giritli stated that Mustafa Kemal inspected Marxist-Leninist, Fascist and National Socialist doctrines and practices and

¹¹⁴ Tunaya, *Siyasi Kurumlar ve Anayasa Hukuku*, pp. 52-54.

¹¹⁵ Suna Kili, “Türk Devrimi: Gelişmiş ve Gelişmekte Olan Ülkeler.” *Türkiye İş Bankası Uluslararası Atatürk Sempozyumu (17-22 Mayıs 1981) – Bildiriler ve Tartışmalar (International Symposium on Atatürk)* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1983), p. 88.

¹¹⁶ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties (Les Partis Politiques)* (New York: Wiley, 1954 [1951]), pp. 358-360.

rejected them all. He concluded that Duverger's claim on the transitional nature of the regime is the best explanation and refer to the period of 1923-1938 as "preparation period for democracy".¹¹⁷ Similarly, according to Schwartzberg, the Turkish single-party is different than other single-party regimes since it had always sided with the "western democratic ideals" and used the single-party rule as an instrument to achieve it. He stated that the Republican People's Party was a rare example which acted as a political school during the "transition to democracy."¹¹⁸

In reality, after the demise of Liberal Republican Party, the ruling-party did not even contemplate a transition to democracy and increasingly justified its hold on power by pointing to – some real, mostly imaginary – threats to the regime. All reforms which weakened authoritarianism and were presented to the public opinion as genuine attempts to adopt democracy came to life after 1945, after the utter defeat of authoritarianism in Europe during the Second World War, chiefly to establish friendly relations with the Allied powers. These reforms included the right to establish trade unions and other class based organizations, the abolition of the Settlement Law of 1934, and the shift towards direct elections. Furthermore, the regime claimed that it was the Republican People's Party which facilitated and led the nation through the process of transition to democracy and cited the previous multi-party experiences as honest attempts to build a multi-party democracy. For instance, Republican publications proudly claimed that the LRP experiment was an undeniable proof of the genuine democratic motives of ruling party since the Republican People's Party "[was] the only single-party which adopted a multi-party system in time without being forced to do it."¹¹⁹ This is a bold and rather unfounded statement that whitewashes twenty two years of authoritarian government. Forming a regime-friendly opposition to relieve the tension in the country and forcing to close it down once the experiment had got out of hand does not qualify a regime to be regarded as a democracy; it only makes it a rather interesting and peculiar form of authoritarianism. The Republican People's Party misleadingly claimed that both short-lived multi-party experiments had been terminated by the government unwillingly due to the 'reactionary' threats and gives

¹¹⁷ İsmet Giritli, "Kemalist İdeoloji ve Nitelikleri." *Türkiye İş Bankası Uluslararası Atatürk Sempozyumu (17-22 Mayıs 1981) – Bildiriler ve Tartışmalar (International Symposium on Atatürk)* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1983), p. 301.

¹¹⁸ Roger-Gérard Schwartzberg, *Sociologie politique* (Paris: Montchrestien, 1988 [1971]). Cited in Toprak, "Türkiye'de Otoriter Modernizm."

¹¹⁹ CHP – Millet Hizmetinde 40 Yıl, p. 3.

no explanation about the ban against socialist, liberal and conservative parties. For the Republican People's Party everything except the party line was reactionary somehow; they were all potentially harmful, dangerous for the independence and the unity of the country. According to İnel, this approach continues today in Turkey as an inheritance from the single-party days. Opponents to the official ideology and state are still deemed dangerous and harmful and their political legitimacy is continuously rejected by the state.¹²⁰

As mentioned above, there was always a 'good' reason to postpone the transition to participatory democracy. Kışlalı summarizes some of these reasons as following: The lack of industrialization and urbanization, widespread poverty, inadequate general education, the non-existence of an organized society with different bases of power balancing each other to protect the minority from a possible tyranny of majority, the lack of a widespread and effective web of mass communication and democratic culture which is based upon tolerance, compromise and the ability and maturity to accept seeing rival ideological movements at the helm. According to Kışlalı, without these conditions it was impossible to establish and preserve a democratic system. Kışlalı legitimizes the single-party years, by stating that since these conditions were not present in 1920s Turkey, the ruling elite needed a period of preparation to lay the groundwork for democracy.¹²¹ The reasoning behind this assumption is quite feeble. This logic tends to overlook the fact that above-mentioned notions such as urbanization, tackling of poverty, establishing different bases of power which counterbalance each other or democratic culture based on tolerance are not the preconditions but rather the results of a democratic system. It is illogical to assume that a democratic culture and the much needed and crucial mind-sets of democracies such as the respect shown towards different political opinions, and tolerance and maturity to accept to see political opponents at office could foster under an authoritarian rule, and to think that dictatorship could lead the way to the establishment of political compromise is at best, an oxymoron. Furthermore, Kışlalı and other Republicans tend to overlook the parliamentary past of the country, and the brief multi-party experience of the Second Constitutional Era, as well.

¹²⁰ Ahmet İnel, "Cumhuriyet Döneminde Otoritarizm." Zeynep Rona (Ed.), *Bilanço 1923-1998: Türkiye Cumhuriyeti'nin 75 Yılına Toplu Bakış* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 1999), p. 40.

¹²¹ Kışlalı, *Kemalizm, Laiklik ve Demokrasi*, p. 17.

Kışlalı gives an example from a speech of Atatürk which was given on the tenth anniversary of the foundation of the Republic and stated that “all requirements of a democracy will be installed to the system when occasion arises ... such as the establishment of political parties.”¹²² Atatürk’s requirements were similar to the above-mentioned ones suggested by Kışlalı, but the intention behind this reasoning is clear: Atatürk and the other party leaders were well aware that in a fair and square electoral process any opposition party had a bigger chance to overthrow them. They experienced this at first hand in the local elections of 1930, in which the newly established Liberal Republican Party managed to win 40 out of 502 municipalities, even in most presumably rigged elections. For the party notables, authoritarian rule was necessary to prevent the exploitation of the ‘uneducated’ and ‘unconscious’ masses – especially the peasantry – by the opposition. They were not willing or ready to handover the power to people they considered malevolent to the future of the country and to their hard-fought reforms.

For the Republican elites, the existence of the Republican People’s Party was much more legal, important, rightful and peculiar than other political organizations. This self-proclaimed uniqueness of the Republican People’s Party’s nature was frequently exploited by the party as a non-sequitur to prove the constant rightfulness and legitimacy of their political decisions and actions. Hence the Republican People’s Party was the entity that had saved the country and established the republic; disagreeing with its policies was not just politically wrong, it was also ethically unjust and in conflict with the national interests. From this ideological standpoint, all political organizations except the ruling party were harmful for the future of the country being either “an obstacle to development, modernization and westernization or a threat against the national unity, national interest or *raison d’être*”,¹²³ therefore their downfall was a patriotic act of the government.

RPP was always defined by Mustafa Kemal not as a regular political party but as an organization unbounded by the limitations of everyday politics. The party was the guide that the country expected,¹²⁴ unblemished from the banality of daily

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ İnsel, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Otoritarizm.”, p. 40.

¹²⁴ “Our party will guide the nation in the intellectual and social revolution.” Speech given in September, 1924. Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri II*, pp. 189-190.

politics.¹²⁵ With this approach he made the single-party untouchable as an idealist entity which was well above the common politics while at the same time he ridiculed the opposition party of the era; the Progressive Republican Party as a crude party which dealt with the unnecessary and trivial matters.¹²⁶ Kemal's comments on the virtues of competitive politics, which are regularly used by the Republicans as a proof, of the democratic tendencies of the single-party regime were only uttered during the state-sponsored Liberal Republican Party experiment and never repeated after 1931.

In summary, there is not a single, sound proof of the alleged "democratic intent" because after 1931, the regime was based on the monopoly of one supreme leader, a single-political party, and an inactive parliament whose members were appointed by the leader. In party publications it was made clear that competitive politics was harmful for the country and the party was to be remained forever at the helm, educate the people politically along the party line whilst excluding them from the political sphere until they evolved into a 'new man' that totally absorbed the party ideology. First references on multi-party democracy were only made after the realization that the Allies were on the verge of victory in the Second World War, the totalitarian regimes of the west were collapsing and it became clear that without being a member of liberal western world Turkey will be isolated completely.

The second common misapprehension on the single-party years is connected to the abovementioned "democratic intent theory". This point which is used in defence of the single-party regime is the presumed "guilty-conscience" of the Republican People's Party officials of the era. This defence is first mentioned by Duverger who stated that the Republican regime was not an ideological but rather a pragmatic single-party regime which opposed the greatest obstacle in front of the modernization; religion, and wholeheartedly endeavoured for the Westernization of the society. According to Duverger; "The Turkish single-party system never leant on a single-party doctrine, never gave a legal quality to the political monopoly, and never tried to abolish the parliamentary discussions. The Republican People's Party always felt at unease, or even shame due to the political monopoly it held. The party had a guilty

¹²⁵ "We hate giving empty promises to the people like common politicians do." Speech given in January, 1925. Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 227.

¹²⁶ "Unlike the political parties of other countries our party does not dwell on common street politics, it is responsible to represent and guide the nation as a whole", Speech given in October, 1925. Ibid., p. 224.

conscience and this reality separated it from its contemporary fascist and communist models.”¹²⁷ Similarly, Kili stated that the zenith of Mustafa Kemal's reform programme was the transition to multi-party democracy and because he could not achieve this goal in his life time, he felt remorse until the end of his life.¹²⁸ Although the claims on the modernizing power of the Republican People's Party are correct, there is nothing to prove the highly unscientific notion of the 'guilty conscience' of the Republican elite. The claims about the reluctance of the Republican elite when establishing an authoritarian system and the guilt they felt afterwards could only be attributed to the wishful thinking on the side of these scholars.

On the contrary to Duverger and Kili's claims, throughout the 1930s pluralism was belittled as a disruptive force while the state as a notion was constantly glorified by the Republican elite. For instance, Secretary-General Peker claimed that parliamentary discussions were obstructive to governmental work since they tend to “complicate political procedures.” He further remarked that the governments should not be held accountable to the parliaments.¹²⁹ For the ruling elite, state was more important than every other political and social institution. According to Arsal it was the “most effective and most important institution on the development of the civilization.”¹³⁰ For Başgil, the “political, legal, economic and social spheres of life” should be shaped according to “the will of the state.”¹³¹ This approach has modern repercussions in Turkish political sphere. According to Kıvanç, this constant glorification of the state and the reluctance to adopt democratic norms eventually led to the prioritisation of the state at the expense of the people. For Kıvanç, for this reason, Turkish society is still trying to live in a space that the state considers its own, to an extent that is permitted by the state; a fact best summarized by Mahçupyan who stated that “politics in Turkey is organized as a domain within the state.”¹³² Therefore claiming that the regime had a 'guilty conscience' due to single-party rule that they

¹²⁷ Duverger, *Political Parties*, pp. 358-360.

¹²⁸ Kili, “Türk Devrimi.”, p. 119.

¹²⁹ Peker, *İnkılâp Dersleri*, pp. 19-20.

¹³⁰ Sadi Maksudi Arsal, Lecture given at the Second Congress of Turkish History, 1937. Türk Tarih Kurumu (Ed.), *II. Türk Tarih Kongresi: Kongrenin Çalışmaları, Kongreye Sunulan Tebliğler, İstanbul: 20 - 25 Eylül 1937*. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2010 [1943]).

¹³¹ Ali Fuat Başgil, “Türk Milliyetçiliği.” Lecture given at the Second Congress of Turkish History, 1937. Türk Tarih Kurumu (Ed.), *II. Türk Tarih Kongresi: Kongrenin Çalışmaları, Kongreye Sunulan Tebliğler, İstanbul: 20 - 25 Eylül 1937*. (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Yayınları, 2010 [1943]).

¹³² Ümit Kıvanç, “Sahibinden Devletin Kavram ve Kapsamı.” *Birikim*, No. 93-94 (January-February, 1997), p. 27-28.

have established, distorts the realities. Turkish single-party state was a definite authoritarian regime. The political sphere and social life in Turkey were regulated and shaped by the state that was dominated by a centralist and hierarchical bureaucratic structure with unlimited and unchecked power. For the Turkish authoritarianism, the existence of autonomous political, economic, cultural and ideological organizations outside of state supervision was intolerable. The single-party rule was not a necessity or a burden that the ruling elite had to carry over their shoulders, it was rather the choice of the ruling elite to easily implement their modernizing reform agenda and continue their rule.

The third misinterpretation of the single-party regime is the assumption of that the existence of the democratic institutions in early-Republican Turkey, such as the parliament and the elections, disqualify early-Republican Turkey from being regarded as an authoritarian state.¹³³ For the supporters of this theory, single-party Turkey should be classified as a democratic or hybrid regime which used some necessary authoritarian measures to achieve its crucial goals in modernization. To evaluate this idea, one should inspect the genuineness of the democratic institutions utilized by the regime. First of all, the parliament and the elections were not established in this era by the Republicans. Until the ban on opposition in 1925, Turkey had already enjoyed 11 years of parliamentary system in total, during 1908-1913 and 1919-1925. The single-party government came into existence in the golden days of Turkish parliamentary life, but with every passing year the regime moved closer to anti-Parliamentarism. The Grand National Assembly during the War of Independence was a much more competitive assembly comparing to the later years of the regime. Starting from War of Independence, every colour of opposition; the Second Group, the Progressive Republican Party, various dissidents and Liberal Republican Party members were all driven away from the parliament.

Even though the existence of the elections was counted by many as a democratic tendency of the Turkish single-party regime, elections in authoritarian states are not a rarity; even Hitler's Germany continued to hold elections. According to Hague and Harrop, nearly in all authoritarian systems elections have still existed though being non-competitive. Only the most extreme dictatorship dispenses with

¹³³ Duverger, *Political Parties*, pp. 358-360.

elections altogether.¹³⁴ Among the types of elections which were held in authoritarian states the notion of ‘acclamatory elections’ suits for Turkey. In acclamatory elections official candidates are presented to the electorate mainly for ritual endorsement. Although single-party regimes following this approach create an illusion about the appearance of choice, these are corrupt affairs since the winner is known in advance. Even the ballot procedure is biased in this type of elections where votes were cast openly but counted secretly.

The republican electoral system was a continuation of the two-stage election system of the late-Ottoman era. In the first stage, electors chose the second stage voters from a list which had been prepared by the party. All of the second stage candidates were party representatives. The voters who were chosen from among these candidates were the ones who would vote in the end for the parliamentary elections. Parliamentary candidates were also predetermined by the party. For an ordinary citizen, a member of the opposition or an independent local party member it was impossible to stand for election on his or her own initiative. There was just one list on the ballots for the second stage voter to approve. Although this voting system was merely a mechanism to legitimize the regime with a pretend demonstration of pluralism, the ruling party left nothing to chance and forced the electors to vote openly and counted the votes secretly. Until 1927, the task of finalizing the list of the parliament members was left to the joint action of the party council but after that date with a change of regulations, Mustafa Kemal started to handpick all of the MPs by himself.¹³⁵ Therefore, in summary the election process was nothing but an elaborate confirmation mechanism of the decisions made by the President without taking the interests of the local population into consideration.

Although Duverger claims that the RPP leaders believed that this type of election was “not ideal, but a temporary and regrettable, unfortunate necessity,” this claim does not represent the truth.¹³⁶ In reality the party leaders defended the electoral system whole-heartedly and attributed their choice of electoral system to the incapability of the citizens to make an unaided choices. Peker took a step further and claimed that the two-round election system was more democratic because with this

¹³⁴ Rod Hague and Martin Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p. 14.

¹³⁵ Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti*, pp. 180-181.

¹³⁶ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties*, pp. 358-360.

system people voted in the first stage for people they personally knew contrary to the direct, one-stage elections.¹³⁷ Peker's claims on the positive aspects of the electoral system were repeated in the party programme of 1931. Fourth article of the programme proposed that the single-party was planning to switch to single-stage elections in the foreseeable future but this announcement was followed with the claim that the two-stage elections were more democratic considering the unique conditions of the Turkish people. The article stated that the Turkish constituents were deprived of the "abilities, conditions and instruments" to familiarize themselves with the electoral candidates therefore the two-stage system was presented as the more preferable choice and as more suitable to the realities of Turkey. It should be noted that this system remained in use until the end of the single-party rule which further supports the assumption that the Republican rhetoric on this issue was based on justifying the non-democratic methods used in the electoral process on the contrary to Duverger's claims.

Another misreading of the Single-Party era is considering it as a mere continuation of the Young Turk era. According to many historians including Zürcher and Hanioglu, the entire Republican ruling elite were products of the Young Turk movement and therefore, their regime can be read as a continuation of the ideology of the Committee of the Union and Progress.¹³⁸ Zürcher states that the Republican People's Party is a direct descendant of the Young Turk movement and defines the period of 1913-50 as an unbroken "Young Turk Era".¹³⁹ Considering that the first three presidents who ruled Turkey until the military coup of 1960 were previously associated with Unionists, Zürcher's periodization of Turkish history is noteworthy and can be used as a useful tool to show the continuities between the late-Ottoman and early Republican eras, but the policies and ideologies of Unionists and Republicans were not wholly identical. It is clear that both groups incorporated drastic and extreme measures in their political methodology to deal with the opposition and unwanted elements in the society, but the Republican regime managed to look as a legitimate and accountable parliamentary regime – at least on paper – right until the end, while the Unionist clique which ruled the country after the elections of 1912 had no

¹³⁷ Peker, *Inkilap Dersleri*, pp. 19-20.

¹³⁸ For a detailed inspection of this continuity, see Erik-Jan Zürcher, *Milli Mücadelede İttihatçılık* (The Unionist Factor: The Role of the Committee of Union and Progress in the Turkish National Movement, 1905-1926), (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003 [1984]).

¹³⁹ Erik-Jan Zürcher, 'The Ottoman Legacy of the Turkish Republic: An Attempt at a New Periodization', *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 32 (1992), pp. 237-53.

reservations of acting as a secret society to carry out their agenda. Unionist regime was radical, dangerous in their intentions and reckless in their actions, while the Republican regime was a much more sophisticated political entity. There were differences on the ideological level, as well. Although both regimes followed similar forms of nationalism and scientism, the sheer scope and depth of the Republican reforms, and their intense determination when targeting the Islamicate traditions of the post-Ottoman society of Anatolia puts the Republican regime in a different category than the Unionist one.

Similarly to Zürcher, Keyder examines the early-Republican era as a continuation of the Young Turk period, as well, especially concerning the financial policies of both groups. He stated, that the Unionists wanted to create a national bourgeoisie to replace the non-Muslim bourgeoisie of the Ottoman Empire and the single-party regime took over this project in time. To achieve this goal they needed a centralised, planned, statist economy and therefore a strong state structure. Keyder concluded that, political authoritarianism was born out of the necessity dictated by these Unionist economic policies. It was not ideological but only functional and was a mere apparatus of the economic statism. According to Keyder, in Turkey some fascistic elements were attached to an authoritarian regime the main objective of which was to speed up the process of the accumulation of capital of the Muslims.¹⁴⁰ This theory, although connections between the Unionists and the Republicans is undeniable, can be misleading to comprehend the nature of Turkish authoritarianism since it does not sufficiently explain the motives of the reforms made in the political, cultural and social spheres. For instance, if the sole concern was continuing the economic policies of the Unionists, why the regime closed every social organization in Turkey? It is improbable that the Turkish Women's Union which was abolished in 1935 was a threat for the policies of the Republicans. Therefore the theory of that the economical statism inherited from the Young Turk era determined the structure of the regime due to a spill-over effect is not useful to comprehend the authoritarian tendencies of the single-party regime.

Another misconception regarding the single-party regime of Turkey is reading it as an anti-imperialist revolution which could be acknowledged as a possible path for

¹⁴⁰ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, pp. 137-140.

the development for all underdeveloped countries. For instance, one Republican observer stated in 1927, that “the Turkish revolution will wake up the whole oppressed Orient”.¹⁴¹ Especially in 1950s and 1960s, many Turkish and foreign experts who acknowledged the Turkish authoritarianism as a champion of modernism which opposed to the Islamicate past of Turkey, promoted the importance of the single-party regime, and even in some cases endorsed it as a possible path for the development for all underdeveloped countries.¹⁴² Similarly, according to Kili, the Turkish revolution constituted an example for the Third World to gain independence and the scale of its influence was similar to the French revolution’s significance on the burgeoning nationalist movements in Europe in the early 19th century.¹⁴³ This claim is difficult to substantiate since the anti-imperialism of the Republican elite only became prominent during the Turkish War of Independence. Right after the end of the war, the Republican regime smoothly integrated with the World-system and did not pursue an anti-imperialist agenda. In fact, paradoxically, their modernist approach gave the regime an orientalist attitude which is visible in how they depicted the bloody campaign in Dersim as a ‘march for civilization’.

For the Republican elite, modernization was synonymous with Westernization. Atatürk stated that “although there are many countries in the world, there is just one civilization and for the progress of our nation, it should be a part of this civilization”.¹⁴⁴ In a different speech, he remarked that it was impossible for Turkey to survive without Westernization because “resistance to the storming impulse of the civilization is futile” and “societies which follow the static medieval laws, ideas and behaviours are bound to demise and captivity”.¹⁴⁵ Atatürk’s perspective regarding the Western civilization being the only civilization suggests that a form of orientalism is traceable within the actions of the single-party regime. This attitude could be described as ‘auto-orientalism’, an attitude which emanates from native people of the East who decided, or forced to look to their native lands through the lenses of the West. Therefore claiming that the Republican single-party regime was a champion of the East and a

¹⁴¹ Halil Nimetullah Öztürk, "Türk İnkılâbının Şümülü." Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Zeynep Kerman, Necat Birinci & Abdullah Uçman (Eds.), *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), p. 212.

¹⁴² For supporters of this position, see Duverger, *Political Parties*; and Schwartzberg, *Sociologie Politique*.

¹⁴³ Kili, "Türk Devrimi.", p. 69.

¹⁴⁴ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 68.

¹⁴⁵ Kili, "Türk Devrimi.", p. 69.

guiding light for the emerging Third-World does not coincide with the ideological framework and the deeds of the regime.

The single-party years were also treated by some scholars, including Milza, as an authoritarianism with a “progressive nature” which can only be described as a forward motion in history, as a bourgeoisie revolution which played its historical role and paved the path for better things and therefore differentiates from other authoritarian regimes such as the fascist ones that emerged to “fight against the modernity”.¹⁴⁶ When dealing with this theory, one should also observe the recent historiography of fascism. As Gentile stated, for a long period of time, fascism was defined “as something inhuman, an expression of diabolical madness, or, in the opposite sense ... as a caricature or in a clownish guise”.¹⁴⁷ Starting from the 1970s, fascism has started to be seen as a distinct ideology and not just a phase of barbarism which aimed to destroy modernity. Especially the recent studies¹⁴⁸ informed us that fascism was indeed a strictly modern ideology which tried to build an alternative form of modernity, therefore the defence on how the Turkish authoritarianism’s modernist agenda clashes with this basic characteristic of fascism has become rather redundant. Being strictly modernist does not rule out the authoritarian attitudes of the Republican regime.

Another significant aspect of the Turkish single-party regime was its attitude concerning the traditional sources of authority in Turkey, which drastically differentiates it from its contemporary single-party rules in Spain, Portugal and Greece. Keyder, in his attempt to locate the Republican People’s Party’s position among its contemporaries, have put it in the same league with the abovementioned “Mediterranean dictatorships” on the grounds of that the Turkish single-party regime did not organically evolve out of a mass movement and followed a more traditionalist path in building a militarist dictatorship.¹⁴⁹ Yet, although the reasoning of this assumption is correct, the findings do not match with the facts. Grouping Turkish

¹⁴⁶ Pierre Milza, *Les fascismes* (Paris: Seuil, 1991), pp. 251-252, cited in Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye’de Otoriter Modernizm*.

¹⁴⁷ Emilio Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion: Definitions and Critical Reflections on Criticism of an Interpretation.” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 5, No. 3, pp. 326-375.

¹⁴⁸ For the prominent recent studies on fascism which define it as a strictly modern phenomenon, see Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism* and Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism: 1914–1945* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995).

¹⁴⁹ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, p. 112.

authoritarianism with the dictatorships such as Spain and Portugal is unsuitable because these regimes worked hand-in-hand with the church,¹⁵⁰ and the monarchy while Turkish authoritarianism terminated the significance of all sources of traditional legitimacy. According to Linz the enthusiastic and constant support of the church and clergy became “one of the basic sources of legitimation” for the regime of Franco. While in Spain, the regime promoted the idea of *nacional-catolicismo*; “the politicized religious culture and its multiple manifestations in political and cultural life to legitimize the authoritarian regime”, the Republicans attacked the traditional Ottoman sources of authority by ending the rule of the Ottoman dynasty and abolishing the Caliphate. These two sources of secular and religious authority could have been useful allies for the Republicans who desperately needed to establish links with the ordinary people, but they decided to overthrow them and build relations with the people through their own channels whether by using the local notables or creating entirely new links through the utilization of education, media, public celebrations, and public monuments. Therefore Keyder’s thesis remains to be problematic on fittingly describing the nature of the Turkish authoritarianism.

Turkish authoritarian regime is also compared with similar newly emerged, modernizing, and nation-building regimes stretching from the Eastern Europe to the Greater Middle East; including the post-Ottoman Balkan states, Iran and Afghanistan.¹⁵¹ Upon inspecting these regimes, one can clearly see a pattern. All of these regimes carried significant imperial legacies, suffered from similar economic problems, performed similar reforms and resorted to oppression during their respective nation-building processes. For instance, in the Balkans several authoritarian regimes which emerged after the World War revoked the constitutions, close the parliaments and discouraged the foundation of political parties. For Fischer, these regimes were influenced by Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany in some matters – such as ethnic policies, leaders with military uniforms, special salutes – without entirely

¹⁵⁰ Juan J. Linz, “The Religious Use of Politics and/or the Political Use of Religion: Ersatz Ideology versus Ersatz Religion.” Hans Meier (Ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume I: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1996]), pp. 102-119.

¹⁵¹ For a comparative study of post-Ottoman Balkan states, see Bernd Fischer (Ed.), *Balkan Strongmen: Dictators and Authoritarian Rulers of South Eastern Europe* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2007) and Frederick F. Anscombe, *State, Faith, and Nation in Ottoman and Post-Ottoman Lands* (Cambridge: CU Press, 2014). For a study of the authoritarian modernization in Turkey and Iran, see Touraj Atabaki and Erik J. Zürcher (Eds.), *Men of Order: Authoritarian Modernization under Atatürk and Reza Shah* (New York: I.B. Tauris, 2004.)

embracing Fascism. Although the authoritarian attitudes and some policies of these regimes were similar to the Turkish example; there were drastic differences between them, as well. Among these countries, Albania under Zog remained as a typical, 19th century monarchical dictatorship, while Alexandr in Yugoslavia established a strong, centralized royal dictatorship to control the Croatian separatism. Boris in Bulgaria formed a more inclusive semi-dictatorship. None of these regimes had neither ambitious reform agendas similar to Turkey, nor a cohesive ideology.¹⁵²

Among the Balkan and Middle Eastern countries only Metaxas' Greece which enjoyed great relations with Republican Turkey created a similar, moderately-fascist rule based on 'anti-communism and anti-parliamentarism' but it was still a drastically different regime. The aesthetics of Metaxas regime were extremely influenced by Italian and German examples including the use of Roman salute, references to a Third Hellenic Civilization – a mythical reference point similar to the Third Reich or Third Rome –, and a uniformed youth organization. None of these elements existed in Republican regime. Furthermore, Metaxas regime lacked a political party and it preserved and promoted the Greek monarchy as a source of legitimacy. Therefore the differences between these two regimes outweigh the similarities.

Finally, in Iran and Afghanistan as well, modernizing authoritarian regimes were established. These regimes used Republican model as an example for their modernization project but remained as traditional monarchies.¹⁵³ Therefore it is fair to say that there is a pattern of authoritarianism in this wide geography stretching from South East Europe to the Middle East the differences between these regimes are far greater than the common traits. These regimes were ruled by very different individuals who accepted different amounts of pluralism in their systems, and although being born from similar circumstances, reached to different conclusions. Therefore these regimes should not be put in the same category. As Fischer rightfully states, it is almost impossible to compare these regimes.

Another problem with the historiography of this period is the common unscholarly treatment that it repeatedly receives. This situation is the result of several reasons. Firstly, due to the interest shown in this era, last decades witnessed to an

¹⁵² Fischer, pp. 1-18.

¹⁵³ Anscombe, p. 186.

increase of popular history books written without scholarly concerns. Secondly, and more importantly, the ideological polarization in modern Turkey have led to the establishment of distinct groups who utilized several events, and personalities of the past according to their political agendas. This led to the resurgence in the publication of several distorted, unscientific and biased narratives of the era. Even today, the single party-years are an integral part of various political discussions and continue to serve ammunition to the daily political debates of the contemporary political factions in Turkey. Two political approaches seem to be especially popular among these factions. The first one, constantly attacks to a crudely conceptualized version of this period while the other faction glorifies these years as sort of a 'Golden Age'. These almost cartoonish depictions of the era are not just of peripheral importance in the ideologies of these factions, but they constitute the very backbone of their political discourse. Therefore social scientists should act extremely careful for not falling into the traps of this rather Manichean perception of the past and rise above the unproductive political bickering.

Conclusion and Contribution of the Study

This long list of the misconceptions regarding the single-party years show us that the Turkish authoritarianism of the era is not studied sufficiently and thoroughly in social sciences, yet it provides us with excellent areas for research. Turkish single-party rule was a unique type of authoritarianism with its modernizing reforms, peaceful foreign policy, show-trials, massacres, and strange theses on history and language. There is much to discuss here but without giving enough importance to the recent studies on authoritarianism, fascism, totalitarianism and political religions, comprehending the nature of the regime, with its ideology and actions, as a whole, seems to be an impossible endeavour. Therefore in the following chapters the single-party years will be examined by using three different yet interrelated lenses: Fascism, political religions, and modernization.

Fascism is related to the Turkish authoritarianism because, as Griffin stated, the central goal of fascism was neither territorial expansion nor a reaction to modernity; it was neither "the preservation of capitalism from the onslaught of socialism" nor "the destruction of the working class movement" but it was a total transformation, a "social,

political, cultural and anthropological revolution” for the national rebirth.¹⁵⁴ According to Kallis, this fascist notion of rebirth was “predicated on the twin concepts of a ‘new man’ and a new, fully inclusive but homogenous national community.”¹⁵⁵ Similarly, Roger Eatwell pointed out in his ‘fascist matrix’ that the quest for a creating a ‘new man’ and the forging ‘a new sense of nation and state’ constitute key themes of fascism.¹⁵⁶ The common theme of all these definitions is the emphasis placed on the transformation of the society which was also one of the key concepts of the Turkish single-party rule. Since other aspects of fascism, such as nationalism and authoritarian rule also correspond to the characteristics of the Turkish single-party rule, a comparison between fascism and Republican regime will be both appropriate and productive to better comprehend the nature of Turkish authoritarianism.

As far as political religions, they are crucial to understand the Turkish single-party rule because Republican regime needed to control the political, social and cultural spheres in Turkey for the success of their transformation project. Republican political religion was an instrument of this policy. Turkish single-party rule was a definite, text-book example of political religions. Emilio Gentile states that the political religions “resembled new churches devoted to propagandizing faith in absolute and unquestionable ideological truths, persecuting the unfaithful and worshipping sacralised human entities”. According to Gentile, these new secular religions are established through “the sacralisation of politics”, a process which he describes as the “merging of the religious and political dimensions” where the regime takes over the features of a religion.¹⁵⁷ In Republican Turkey, the regime sacralised the secular entities such as the party and its leaders, most importantly the ‘eternal chief’ Atatürk and established a political religion based on these entities.

Modernization, the concept which is used in the fourth chapter will be helpful to link the previous chapters together, since in every action of the regime, from establishing a single-party rule to building a new social order, the motivation for modernization is quite visible. In fact, modernization can be read as one of the central concepts of the Republican identity on which the Turkish political religion was built

¹⁵⁴ Roger Griffin, “The Palingenetic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology.” Alessandro Campi (Ed.), *Che cos'è il fascismo? Interpretazioni e prospettive di ricerche* (Rome: Ideazione, 2003), pp. 97-122.

¹⁵⁵ Aristotle Kallis, *Fascism and Genocide in Inter-War Europe* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 4.

¹⁵⁶ Roger Eatwell, *Fascism: A History* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 94-95.

¹⁵⁷ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 45.

upon. As the previous parts of this chapter showed, the early Republican regime was aggressive towards any type of plurality in the political, social and cultural spheres and tried actively to mould a uniform national identity for the citizens. The key element of this new identity was the modernity. For the Republican elite, modernization which they equated with Westernization was the only solution to overcome the problems that led to the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The only way for Turkey to continue existing was modernizing as fast as possible and the most significant obstacles hindering this process were the values and traditions emanated from the past, specifically the Islamicate, “eastern” past, which the regime associated with the perceived darkness of the Middle Ages. Therefore, the Republican reform agenda can be summarized as modernizing as fast as possible, and at any cost, in every sphere of life, such as the legal system, education, economy and industry to generate everlasting change in the traditional social order. These changes would have served the ultimate objective of altering both the look and the mind-set of the country for good, cutting off the ties with Eastern traditions and culture and firmly integrating Turkey into the Western civilization. Therefore these three lenses used in this research do interact with each other. The authoritarianism of the regime was based on a political religion, and fuelled by the need of modernizing at any cost. The utilization of these lenses will help to provide a coherent identity to this much debated era of Turkish history.

Chapter 2

Turkish Authoritarianism as a Form of Fascism

The party takes the responsibility of governing upon itself in the name of the nation.

- Declaration of the establishment of the single-party regime, Third Grand Party Congress of the Republican People's Party, 1931

In May 1931, at the Third Grand Party Congress¹⁵⁸ of the Republican People's Party it was declared that the Turkish Republic was, and would remain a single-party state. This declaration was significant, yet it was nothing more than stating the obvious. In fact, after the closure of the Progressive Republican Party due to allegations of its involvement with an Islamic revivalist revolt in 1925, RPP was ruling the country for the last six years without being challenged. In the following years, opportunities for building a full-fledged democracy existed in Turkey but the Republican elite was not willing to give up their power. In July 1930, due to several interrelated motives, most significantly to soften the devastating effects of the Great Depression of 1929, the Republican regime experimented with the idea of establishing a state-sponsored, tame opposition party, which would remain loyal to the main Republican tenets and would help to relax the tense political climate but it turned out that the Republicans underestimated the level of the discontent of the people. Due its increasing popularity the new opposition was pressured by the regime to close itself. This was the last

¹⁵⁸ Third Grand Party Congress of the RPP was actually the second one. To claim the entire inheritance of Turkish War of Independence, the Sivas Congress (*Sivas Kongresi*), the temporary assembly of the nationalist movement that was held for one week from 4 to 11 September 1919 in the eastern Anatolian city of Sivas and participated by all factions of the A-RMHC, the precursor of the RPP, is recognized as the inaugural party congress.

attempt to create a competitive political sphere which ended with bitterness and resentments.

Nonetheless, the Third Grand Party Congress was still a crucial landmark moment of the Republican history because the plan for working in a multi-party system even with a meek, manageable opposition was renounced and an authoritarian model officially took its place. Until the end of the Second World War not a single legal opposition group was allowed to participate in the political field. Furthermore, at the Congress, the cohesive ideological framework of the regime was introduced with the principles known as Six Arrows, which were Republicanism, Populism, Secularism, Reformism, Nationalism and Statism. During the zenith of the single-party rule in Turkey, the principles of the party, became the principles of the state, as well.

A month after the Congress, the media which was already under heavy pressure from 1925 onward, came under strict state control with the enactment of the new Press Law of 1931 but the reach of the single-party rule was not restricted just to the political sphere and media. The Republican ideology was encircling the whole society from every angle imaginable. The education system utilized new institutions such as People's Houses and, from 1939 onwards, People's Chambers; which were directly controlled by the single-party and provided an elaborate form of supplementary education and adult education for the masses to disseminate the Republican ideology among the masses.

The social sphere as well was controlled by the single-party. All voluntary social organizations, such as the Sufi religious orders¹⁵⁹ which were outlawed in 1925, were forced to put an end to their activities. Turkish Hearths which were the main organisations for the conceptualisation of Turkish nationalism during the late-Ottoman and early-Republican era, were forced to terminate their operations in 1931. Similarly, Turkish Women's Union, the flagship organization of the feminist movement in Turkey was pressured by the government to conclude their activities in 1935 on the

¹⁵⁹ On November 30, 1925, Sufi religious orders were closed in Turkey and all buildings which were designed for the gatherings of Sufi brotherhoods were confiscated. All religious and spiritual titles derived from leading, serving to or being a member of a Sufi religious order or performing a heterodox religious, or spiritual act were forbidden and became punishable criminal acts. For the full-text of the legislation closing the Sufi brotherhoods, see *Resmi Gazete*, No. 243 (December 12, 1925), Law No. 677, p. 113.

grounds that it had “completed its task” after the political enfranchisement of the Turkish women.¹⁶⁰ Along with these organizations, other social organizations such as the Masonic Lodges were closed. The formation of the class-based organizations was also forbidden. Therefore in the single-party Turkey, not just the political sphere, but the media and cultural and social spheres were as well under the control of the political regime. In this era, any kind of pluralism was purged out of the society.

The abandonment of pluralism and the adoption of an omnipotent single-party state fitted in well with the *zeitgeist* of the inter-war era Europe. In this period which constitutes the temporal landscape of this research the majority of European countries were controlled by authoritarian regimes. According to Pinto and Larsen, in the latter stages of the Second World War, participatory democracy was practiced only in four countries in Europe; Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom, and even in these countries in a restricted form¹⁶¹ while the rest of the continent was under control of authoritarian regimes of various forms, ranging from the military dictatorships of Spain and Portugal, through Fascism of Nazi Germany and Italy, to the communist single-party regime of the Soviet Union.

Authoritarianism can be described as a political system which concentrated all political functions in the hands of a dictator or a small group of privileged notables; where fundamental freedoms were restricted by an oppressive police force, and opposition was silenced or crushed by state-sponsored intimidation. In authoritarian regimes, rulers stand above the law and are free from effective popular accountability. The media are either directly controlled or cowed. Political participation is usually limited and discouraged.¹⁶² All of the prerequisites listed here were integral parts of the Republican regime in Turkey. The political power was in the hands of the Presidents; initially Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938) and later his successor, İsmet İnönü (1884-1973). In Turkish single-party regime, the presidents were unaccountable to any legal body or to the masses. On paper, there was a parliament and a cabinet of ministers led by a prime minister who were accountable to public opinion but

¹⁶⁰ At the time of their closure, the Union was organised in four large cities, and had 1,000 registered members.

See Yaprak Zihinoğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği* (İstanbul: Metis, 2003).

¹⁶¹ António Costa Pinto & Stein Ugelvik Larsen, “Conclusion: Fascism, Dictators and Charisma.” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (2006), pp. 251-257.

¹⁶² Hague & Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics*, p. 14.

following the demise of the Progressive Republican Party in 1925, the parliament had lost all of its impartiality and become a mechanism to ratify the political agenda of the Presidents. Other members of the ruling elite were a group of ideologues and bureaucrats who remained in the inner circle of the presidents, and parliament members who were handpicked by the presidents.

In Turkish single-party regime “autonomy of the individual from the collective”¹⁶³ was not recognized. In early Republican Turkey the individual was seen merely as a member, an integral part of a coherent, cohesive monolith of a society which was perceived to be undivided by any ideological, gender-related or class-based differences and was described by Peker, the Secretary-General of the single-party as “a national bloc”.¹⁶⁴ In Republican discourse the interests of this bloc should always trump over the rights of the individual, as Peker stated people should not be allowed to “have their own way” and should work together to reach the common goals set by the regime.¹⁶⁵ Therefore establishing political parties, or voicing one’s ideology or identity through the instrumentality of social organisations was discouraged. There was only a single party in the political sphere, and its ideological, cultural, social institutions controlled their respective fields. This was the entire setup that ruled the country between 1925 and 1945. The Turkish Republic was therefore can be defined as an authoritarian regime.

This chapter, like the rest of the study, is an analysis of this authoritarian regime. These regimes do tend to vary according to the amount of plurality they allowed to exist in the society. Usually, authoritarian regimes had to find partners among the remaining actors of the society such as large landowners, industrialists, religious establishment, monarchy, or the military and form alliances with them to widen their base of support and legitimize their rule.¹⁶⁶ According to Juan J. Linz this coalition of actors forms a type of “limited pluralism” within the authoritarian regimes and constitutes one of the differences between authoritarianism and its most absolute

¹⁶³ Emilio Gentile & Robert Mallett, “The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism.” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2000), p. 24.

¹⁶⁴ Tan, February 24, 1936.

¹⁶⁵ Peker, *İnkılâp Dersleri*, pp. 59-64.

¹⁶⁶ Hague & Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics*, p. 17.

and oppressive form; totalitarianism.¹⁶⁷ In Turkish authoritarianism, the relations of the regime with the aforementioned actors were rather intricate. The monarchy in Turkey; the Ottoman Sultanate was abolished in November 1922 by the Republicans and the last Sultan Vahdeddin defected to British occupation forces in Istanbul and was taken to Malta. Therefore forming an alliance with the monarchy was not practically possible, or ideologically conceivable for the Republican ruling elite. Similarly, the religious establishment, or what was left of it, was not a suitable candidate for practical and ideological reasons. In this era, starting with the Caliphate,¹⁶⁸ an office held by the Ottoman sultans for centuries which harboured claims of representing all Muslims of the world, and Sufi religious orders; centuries-old institutions associated with Islam were abolished to make room to a new, state-friendly, national version of Islam. The abolition of Caliphate on March 3, 1924, was followed by the closure of the Ministry of Religious Affairs which was itself a continuation of the office of *Sheik ul-Islam*, the highest ranking individual in the religious bureaucracy of the Ottoman Empire and to replace them, a state agency called Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) was established. With the outlawing of the Sufi religious orders in 1925, this organization became the sole authority over religious matters and promoted a modernised, Turkified, and westernized version of Islam. With this chain of reforms the sources of traditional religious authority were eliminated from the political, legal, cultural and social spheres according to the Republican ideology which aimed to reduce the visibility of Islam, the values associated with and the traditions emanated from it. Therefore similarly to the monarchy, the religious establishment in Turkey was never considered as a partner for the Republican ruling elite.

Among the aforementioned social elements, only large landowners, industrialists and the military became partners of the Republican regime with varying degrees of influence over the policy making process of the government. Large landowners constituted the largest pressure group in the Republic. A significant number of

¹⁶⁷ Juan J. Linz, "Authoritarianism." Joel Krieger (Ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Politics of the World* (2nd Edition) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001 [1993]), pp. 60-64.

¹⁶⁸ For a history of the caliphate as an institution see, Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), and Dominique Sourdel, A.K.S. Lambton, Frederick de Jong, & P.M. Holt, "Khalifa." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2015. First appeared online: 2012, First Print Edition: 1960-2007.

the large land-owners were members of the parliament during the single-party era and the government utilized their traditional connections with the peasantry which proved to be crucial for the regime, in exchange of representing the interests of the land-owners against the peasants.¹⁶⁹ A telling example of this symbiotic relationship is the constitution of 1924 which prohibited the possibility of a land reform. As for the industrialists, similarly to the landowners, they were supported by the government. With the Encouragement of the Industry Law of 1927 (*Teşvik-i Sanayi Kanunu*), tax immunity was introduced for the new and developing firms. Additionally, land donations, and guaranteed tenders in public procurement against foreign competition were bestowed on businessmen and industrialists who enjoyed good relations with the government. Later these close relations between the state-sponsored industrialists and party members who represented their interests in the government would lead to the establishment of '*İş Bankası Group*', a pressure group gathered around Turkey's first public bank. With the contribution of this group, while regulating the labour relations, the regime recurrently took the side of the industrialists over the proletariat. In the period of 1934-1938, the real wages of proletariat dropped 25 per cent while the profit of the state-sponsored industrialists steadily increased.¹⁷⁰ The pinnacle of the close corporation between big business and the single party was the new Labour Law of 1936 (*İş Kanunu*), which denied the workers the right to strike.¹⁷¹

The last component that played a role in the Republican regime was the military, which was traditionally involved in politics in Turkey but the level of autonomy they have enjoyed in this era was limited in comparison to the late-Ottoman and multi-party democracy eras. During the single-party years the military was put under strict governmental control although it still had a level of autonomy. For instance, Fevzi Çakmak,¹⁷² who served as the Chief of the General Staff during the entirety of this era, was still influential in political decisions concerning the national security. An

¹⁶⁹ Ahmad, *The Making Of Modern Turkey*, pp 93-97.

¹⁷⁰ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, pp. 133-134.

¹⁷¹ Article 72 of the law stated that "strike and lockout are forbidden." *Resmi Gazete*, No. 3330 (June 15, 1936), Law No. 3008, p. 856.

¹⁷² Fevzi Çakmak (1876-1950) was the Chief of the General Staff (1918-1919) and later Minister of War (1920) during the last days of Ottoman Empire before joining the nationalist movement in Ankara. As one of the most decorated commanders of his time, he was appointed as the Chief of General Staff of the nationalist armies, and continued to serve in this office until his retirement in 1944. Çakmak who became the personification of the military due to his long tenure which covered almost the entire span of the single-party regime, was almost always referred as with his military rank, "The Marshall" (*Mareşal*).

example of Çakmak's influence on the civil policy making processes is evident in Samet Ağaoğlu's memoirs. According to Ağaoğlu who was working as a high-level bureaucrat in the Ministry of Finance, in 1937 the Ministry decided to build the first iron-steel industry complex in the region of Karadeniz Ereğli, a coastal town in North-western Turkey. The decision was based on economic considerations, and the seaside location of Ereğli. Ağaoğlu states, that Çakmak had his reservations regarding the location of the factory which he found "hard to defend". His decision was effected by the ever rising tension in Europe and the increasing possibility of a war. Considering his opinion the government decided to relocate the complex to Karabük, a town which is located 150 kilometres inland from Ereğli although running the factory there was far more expensive and harder to manage. Considering the factory would be built in 1937, when bells of war were ringing in Europe, the decision seems to be reasonable from the military perspective.¹⁷³

Yet, despite Çakmak's autonomy, his relatively large sphere of influence never interfered with the authority of the presidents and never harmed the harmonious regime-military relations. More importantly, not just the military but every other partner of the single-party regime never interfered with its ideological formation, and its reform programme which regulated the social and cultural spheres in the Republican Turkey. Therefore, even if a "limited pluralism" was inherent in the single-party regime of Turkey, the interests of the components of this pluralism did not clash with the total control which the regime had over the people of Turkey.

The complete single-party control of the political, social and cultural spheres show the totalitarian tendencies embedded within the Republican regime. One of the most significant events of the era; the party-state merger of 1935 which announced that the Republican Turkey will be a party-state, and party members will hold dual-positions in the state bureaucracy and the party administration, is another example of these tendencies. According to regulations of the merger, for instance, the Minister of the Interior became the Party Secretary-General as well. With this merger even the different groups which provided a limited level of pluralism were forced to be incorporated within a single structure. It is noticeable that these totalitarian tendencies

¹⁷³ For more information on this and other similar incidents of Çakmak's interventions, see Ali Bayramoğlu, "Asker ve Siyaset." Ahmet İnsel and Ali Bayramoğlu (Eds.), *Bir Zümre, Bir Parti – Türkiye'de Ordu* (Istanbul: Birikim, 2004), pp. 70-71.

embodied by the party-state merger increased in the mid-1930s, in synchronicity with the proliferation of a special form of totalitarianism in Europe.

For the interwar years, one can clearly say that authoritarianism, and especially its totalitarian variant fascism, which emerged out of a complex range of historical forces became the norm in European politics. The first catalyst of the fascist upsurge was the First World War, which changed the face of the continent and created a power vacuum in Europe. According to Mazower, millions of dead people, broken families, insurrections, mutinies, revolutions, and the sense of a complete destruction of the social order after the collapse of the old regimes led to the emergence of “fatherless communities,” which were psychologically ready and eager for authoritarian regimes.¹⁷⁴

Benito Mussolini’s apparent success in Italy was another factor which gave impetus to the continental fascism. Afterward the Great Depression, which was perceived as the utter defeat of liberalism, this trend accelerated to such a level that democracy could only survive in just a few countries. This almost simultaneous appearance of fascist movements throughout Europe in the early 1930s was the most ominous political consequence of the Great Depression. Yet, it was Hitler’s victory that made fascism a universal ideology. Hobsbawm summarized the importance of Hitler’s success as follows: “Without the triumph of Hitler in Germany in early 1933, fascism would not have become a general movement”.¹⁷⁵ After Hitler’s ascent to power, totalitarian version of authoritarianism gained further ground at the expense of competitive democracies. The combination of these factors paved the way to the proliferation of authoritarianism across the continent.¹⁷⁶

The effects of this phenomenon was felt in Republican Turkey, as well. The sufferings of the refugees who arrived to Turkey wave after wave after the loss of the Ottoman Europe, the devastating effects of the World War I and the collapse of the old Ottoman regime, created a ‘fatherless community’ in Turkey, as well, which

¹⁷⁴ Mark Mazower, *The Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (London: Vintage, 1999), p. 79.

¹⁷⁵ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: 1914-1994* (London: Abacus, 1995), p. 116.

¹⁷⁶ Portugal (1926), Germany (1933), Latvia (1934), Estonia (1934), Bulgaria (1934), Greece (1936) and Spain (1939) are some of the important examples of this authoritarian trend. John Merriman divides up European dictatorships in two groups: Pre-Hitler Dictatorships (Pre-1933) which are composed of Portugal, Italy, Yugoslavia, Turkey, and Poland and Post-Hitler Dictatorships (Post-1933) which were formed in Spain, Germany, Austria, Hungary, Greece, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Bulgaria. John Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 1112.

proved to be a fertile ground for the Republican ideals of establishing an ideal, national community. This reality gives further meaning to the surname adopted by Mustafa Kemal; Atatürk (literally the father of Turks). Similarly, the universal collapse of liberalism after the Great Depression which presented authoritarianism as a reasonable alternative to liberal democracies played an important role in the initial success of Turkish authoritarianism, as well. Interestingly, despite the similarity between the backgrounds of European fascism and Republican regime, it is impossible to depict the Turkish single-party experience as a mere copy of the German, or Italian regimes. Although the increase of totalitarian tendencies in Republican Turkey and the rise of fascism in Europe coincided with each other, it should be noted the Turkish single-party regime was not a version of the European examples but it developed in time, organically. This experience was influenced in some aspects by the continental practices but mostly came to life from the internal dynamics of Turkey. In fact the authoritarian tendencies of the regime started much earlier than the proliferation of authoritarianism in Europe, and therefore it can be perceived as a precursor of them more than being their successor.

Therefore comparing this local authoritarianism which managed to outlive its European counterparts with them will provide us the opportunity to better comprehend the nature of Turkish authoritarianism. In this chapter of the thesis fascism will be used as a lens to make this comparative analysis. The first part of the chapter will define what fascism is. This part will be followed by an assessment of Turkish authoritarianism in comparison with the main tenets of fascism.

Theoretical Framework: The Fascist Minimum

Fascism is a broad term which is defined and re-defined countless by social scientists since it became a phenomenon during the inter-war era. In its simplest form fascism is a totalitarian variant of authoritarianism. Its arrival to the political scene following the chaos of the First World War was not a coincidence. The First World War was not just a physical catastrophe that took the lives of the millions; it was a psychological disaster as well. It broke the minds and souls of the people who fought on the frontlines and their loved ones who waited for them at home. The war created a political and social vacuum in Europe that soon would be filled with hatred, paranoia and chaos.

Along with the collapse of the existing, old regimes and with them the old ruling classes, their machinery of power, influence, and hegemony also fell.¹⁷⁷ Democratic governments and coalitions which were established after the collapse of the European monarchies, often appeared weak and unstable; the middle classes, squeezed between the big industrialists and the proletariat, became disfranchised and open for ultra-right propaganda thus composed the driving force of fascism; and lastly the propertied classes gave their support to authoritarianism due to the abnormal, almost paranoid fear of a socialist revolution. The economic situation was equally devastating. Although the European economy managed to recover from the record-breaking hyperinflation of post-World War years and enjoyed a course of economic boom in the 1920s, it eventually crash-landed with the arrival of the Great Depression in 1929. The Great Depression created an atmosphere of crisis and pessimism and caused a previously unseen amount of unemployment which was exploited by the fascist movements.

In this turbulent climate, fascism presented itself as a political and social system which aimed to “protect and rebuild the unity, energy and purity of a nation”.¹⁷⁸ It glorified the nation and advocated for a warrior state seeking to recover former national glories, led by an all-powerful leader, to whom masses would show total commitment and submission.¹⁷⁹ Unlike typical authoritarian regimes, fascism had a revolutionary discourse which placed the vision of the “nation’s imminent rebirth from decadence” in its core.¹⁸⁰ This revolutionary approach, the total rejection of the bourgeois civilization which was associated with the deterioration of order in Europe, and its grandiose promises made fascism a viable option for the discontent masses of the continent.

Social scientists identified many different characteristics of fascism. For some, including Benito Mussolini himself, its fervent anti-socialism was regarded as a basic component of fascism.¹⁸¹ Similarly, the mainline communist definition of fascism as “the terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, chauvinistic and imperialist

¹⁷⁷ Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes*, p. 126.

¹⁷⁸ Merriman, *A History of Modern Europe*, p. 1093.

¹⁷⁹ Hague & Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics*, p. 34.

¹⁸⁰ Griffin, “The Palingenetic Core of Generic Fascist Ideology.”, pp. 97-122.

¹⁸¹ Mussolini described fascism as the complete opposite of socialism. For further information, see Giovanni Gentile & Benito Mussolini, “The Doctrine of Fascism.” *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (July 1933), pp. 341-356.

elements of finance capital” which was formulated by Bulgarian communist leader Dimitrov in 1930s remained as canon in socialist ideology for decades. Therefore it is fair to say that both sides perceived each other as the antitheses of their own ideologies. The main conflict between socialism and fascism was the fact while socialism regarded class conflict as the central force of politics, fascism, on the other hand, denied the difference of interest between social classes; and it focused on the unity of people from different classes around the common cause of nationhood. Fascists considered the nation as a monolithic body, a unity, without any distinction whatsoever between classes. From the fascist standpoint, struggle between classes could not be tolerated. Instead, the struggle between nations was glorified and promoted as the only meaningful one.

Another important aspect of the fascist ideology was the enormous emphasis put on the role of the leader. Fascist leaders presented themselves as strong, charismatic and aggressive figures. They emancipated themselves from any constitutionally defined notion of political leadership. Heywood states that in fascism “the leader is the symbolic embodiment of the people”.¹⁸² The leader-principle was perceived by fascists as the guiding principle of the fascist state. The fascist leader possessed both unlimited legal power and unquestionable ideological authority. The role and the importance of the leader were to be constantly repeated to the people and the leader was to enjoy direct, personal contact with them, through mass meetings, popular demonstrations and plebiscites. This form of leadership is an example of the charismatic leadership which was described by Max Weber as one of the three legitimisations of the political domination and as “the authority of the extraordinary and personal spiritual gift, the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership.”¹⁸³ These characteristics attributed to Fascism can be multiplied. Fascism’s stance against parliamentary systems, its expansionism, the dislike against minorities (in German example a fervent anti-Semitism), and encouragement of the masses to actively support the regime instead of promoting mere political apathy can be added to this list. There are several problems with this approach though. First of all, some of these characteristics can be found in non-fascist ideologies and movements in well.

¹⁸² Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, pp. 219-220.

¹⁸³ Max Weber, *Politik als Beruf* (Munich: Duncker & Humblot, 1919), p. 5.

Secondly, defining an ideology in negative terms, just by listing what an ideology is not, rather than describing what is it, seems inappropriate. Additionally, focusing on the peripheral features of fascism instead of focusing to its core identity may lead to problems of our understanding of fascist regimes. Therefore historians and other social scientists allocated a substantial amount of time to define what fascism really is and study it.

According to Emilio Gentile the literature on Fascism can be divided in two major eras. Until the 1970s, according to the traditional history writing fascism was a non-ideology. Instead, it was regarded as a sort of anti-historical and anti-modern phenomenon which came to existence in a special era of history and in a special geography – Inter-War Era Europe – and would never be repeated anytime, anywhere in the world. Fascism was regarded not as a coherent political thought but as a movement of violence. As Gentile stated fascism was defined “as something inhuman, an expression of diabolical madness, or, in the opposite sense ... as a caricature or in a clownish guise. As a result, whether demonised or trivialised, fascism was reduced to a historical negativity”.¹⁸⁴

After 1970s, fascism has started to be seen as a distinct ideology. First historian who dealt with fascism as an ideology was George L. Mosse, who studied the culture and political style of National Socialism. According to Gentile, Mosse considered fascism “a phenomenon not at all foreign to the course of contemporary history but, on the contrary, argued that its roots lay deep in the history and society of modern Europe”. Following Mosse, Juan J. Linz specified that any definition of fascism could not be based only on its negations, but “should also consider its new appeal and its conception of man and society”. Linz added that, “no definition can ignore the importance of its distinctive style, its rhetoric and its symbolism, its chants, ceremonies and shirts that attracted so many young people in the years between the two wars”.¹⁸⁵

Stanley Payne continued this trend and defined fascism as an ideology on its own, in fact as the only major new ideology of the twentieth century and stated fascist

¹⁸⁴ Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion.”, pp. 326-375.

¹⁸⁵ Juan J. Linz, “Some Notes toward a Comparative Study of Fascism in Sociological Historical Perspective.” Walter Laqueur (Ed.), *Fascism: A Reader's Guide* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), pp. 24-26.

movements had these common features: Permanent nationalistic one-party authoritarianism which is neither temporary nor a prelude to internationalism, the charismatic leadership principle (incorporated by many communist and populist regimes as well), the search for a synthetic, ethnicist ideology which should be distinct from liberalism and Marxism, an authoritarian state system and lastly, a political economy of corporatism, syndicalism or partial socialism.¹⁸⁶

According to Gentile, fascism studies entered a stage of stagnation during 1980s. In this era the existence of fascism as a different type of government than authoritarianism was questioned. An example of this scholarship is Renzo de Felice, an expert of Italian Fascism and Mussolini, who remarked that there was no connection or valid comparisons to be drawn between Italian Fascism and German National Socialism. According to De Felice these two were completely different ideologies from each other which made determining an overarching definition for fascism an almost impossible task.¹⁸⁷

The stagnation of Fascism studies came to end in 1990s which marked the beginning of a new period characterised “by a renewed, major interest in the theoretical aspects of fascism, turning scholarly attention toward its cultural and aesthetic aspects, while also attributing a primary role to ideology and culture in an attempt to give the fascist phenomenon a more precise definition”.¹⁸⁸ In this period, Roger Griffin’s new definition of fascism primarily in terms of its “positive” ideological axioms, which he condensed into a single phrase: “Fascism is a genus of political ideology whose mythic core in its various permutations is a *palingenetic* form of the populist ultra-nationalism” became the paramount definition of fascism.¹⁸⁹ Griffin’s definition is widely accepted because it does not define fascism as a form of reactionary movement, or barbarism exclusive to a certain era in the past. Furthermore, it defined what fascism is instead of describing what fascism is not. This popular definition includes all the core values of universal fascist movements and leaves out

¹⁸⁶ Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 517.

¹⁸⁷ De Felice, the most prominent but also a divisive historian of Italian Fascism also claimed that Mussolini was not a nationalist or racist, and he was a ‘progressive’ whereas Hitler was a ‘reactionary’. For a critic of his work, see Denis Mack Smith, “Mussolini: Reservations about Renzo De Felice’s Biography.” *Modern Italy*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 193-210. For a brief overview of his voluminous work on Italian fascism, see Emilio Gentile, “Renzo De Felice: A Tribute.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 32, No. 2 (April 1997), pp. 139-151.

¹⁸⁸ Gentile, “Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion.”, p. 336.

¹⁸⁹ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 26.

all characteristics exclusive to certain versions of fascism. For instance, the connection between Nazi ideology and anti-Semitism is peculiar to this version of fascism alone; there were and would be in the future fascist movements which are not anti-Semite, and similarly there were and would be anti-Semite movements which are not fascist. Thus, the definition establishes a “fascist minimum” which includes two main components: “*palingenesis*” and “populist ultra-nationalism”.

Etymologically, the term ‘*palingenesis*’, derives from Greek word *palin* (again, new) and *genesis* (creation, birth), and refers to the sense of a new start or regeneration after a phase of crisis or decline. Using this term, Griffin draws attention to the sense of messianic or fanatical mission embodied within fascism which Heywood describes as policies promoting the ideas of “the prospect of national regeneration, the rebirth of the national pride, and the promise of national greatness.”¹⁹⁰ Griffin states, this concept is visible in every fascist movement, since they tend to highlight the moral bankruptcy and cultural decadence of modern society and proclaim the necessity of national rejuvenation, which is symbolized by the image of the nation rising once again, phoenix-like from its ashes.¹⁹¹ The second component of the definition is, ‘populist ultra-nationalism’. Here, populism means that the ruling elite, in practice or in principle depend on ‘power of the people’ as the basis of their legitimacy. Ultra-nationalism is another rudimentary element of fascism. It should be noted, that fascism as an ideology seeks to promote much more than mere patriotism. It wishes to establish an intense and militant sense of national identity. This militant, and extreme type of nationalism which according to Griffin rejects basic values of humanism is defined as ‘ultra-nationalism’. While this ultra-nationalism internally targets the minorities, externally it usually includes a fervent, aggressive expansionism to expand the territories of the nation, and subjugate the enemies.¹⁹² Therefore, in summary, the modern consensus on fascism, tends to describe it as an authoritarian, revolutionary, and ultra-nationalist movement or regime, whose policies are based on the elimination of the internal and external enemies of the nation to revive it, and reclaim its ‘past glories’.

¹⁹⁰ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, p. 223.

¹⁹¹ Griffin, *The Nature of Fascism*, p. 26.

¹⁹² For a summary of fascist expansionism, see Aristotle Kallis, *Fascist Ideology – Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (London: Routledge, 2000).

The connection between fascism and Turkish single-party rule is rarely examined and in these rare occasions, the methodologies of these studies remained to be problematic. In these works, instead of focusing on the aforementioned core values of fascism, social scientists tended to look on some – and mostly trivial – elements of some of the fascist regimes, and compare these elements with the policies of Turkish authoritarianism. For instance Plaggenborg states that the criminal law of Republican Turkey was imported from Fascist Italy and describes this decision as a significant link between Republican regime and fascism.¹⁹³ On the other hand, Feroz Ahmad states that fascist regimes used paramilitary organizations and uniformed youth organizations and uses the lack of such organizations in Republican Turkey as a proof of Republican elite's refusal of totally embracing fascism. Similarly, Keyder and Plaggenborg pointed out that in fascist regimes, the regimes usually mobilized the masses, and created mass parties to manufacture support and consent from the masses, while in Republican Turkey, the elites never went to the masses and decided to form a vanguard party.¹⁹⁴ Parla focused on the corporatist element in Fascist Italy, compared it with the corporatism defined by the Republicans and came to the conclusion that the corporatism in Turkey was drastically different than the Fascist model.¹⁹⁵ These examples, and many more show, that randomly picking an element from various fascist models and questioning its existence in Turkish authoritarian regime is an extremely problematic methodology. It is arbitrary and misses the core of fascism altogether. Taking the criminal law of Fascist Italy did not make Turkey fascist; similarly, copying the civil code of Switzerland did not make it a democracy. As for the youth organizations; they were not an integral part of the fascist experience. For instance, Metaxas regime in Greece had fascist tendencies and a uniformed youth organization, but Metaxas did not form a mass political party in Greece which is according to Keyder and Plaggenborg a necessity to have a fascist system. Therefore from the standpoint of Ahmad, Metaxas regime can be defined as fascist while for

¹⁹³ Stefan Plaggenborg, *Ordnung und Gewalt: Kemalismus, Faschismus, Sozialismus* (München: Oldenbourg Wissenschafts Verlag, 2012), p. 149. In his comparison of Fascist Italy and Republican Turkey, Plaggenborg used other various "fascist" characteristics, as well. Some of these are; corporatism (p. 150), having a mass political party (pp.186-195), the militarization of the political sphere (p. 257) and the extreme death-toll and barbarity of the fascist regimes (pp. 263-277).

¹⁹⁴ Keyder, pp. 137-140., and Plaggenborg, pp. 186-195.

¹⁹⁵ For Parla's study on corporatist elements in Republican regime, see Taha Parla, *Ziya Gökalp, Kemalizm ve Türkiye'de Korporatizm* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1989).

Keyder and Plaggenborg, it was not fascist which shows the arbitrary nature of the methodology used in these studies.

It should be noted that none of the aforementioned scholars entirely dismissed the connections between fascism and the Republican regime. They all came to the nuanced conclusions in their respective studies. Ahmad mentioned the existence of some elements which gave a “fascist colouring”¹⁹⁶ to the regime while Plaggenborg stated there were many occasions in which the Republican rule closely resembled Fascism, without totally embracing it. Similarly, Keyder acknowledges that some “fascistic elements”¹⁹⁷ were attached to the economic statism of the Republic while Parla claims that there were partly fascistic tendencies in the Republican ideology but they did never dominate the entire ideology. Still, the aforementioned examples show us how misleading is the method of arbitrarily selecting random characteristics which do not represent the core values, the very soul of fascism to understand the nature of the Turkish single-party regime. Therefore, in this study, instead of arbitrarily selecting some elements from various fascist examples, the aforementioned overarching consensus on fascism which is recently established among the scholars of fascism studies, will be employed as a measuring stick to examine the fascist tendencies of the Turkish single-party regime. The rest of this chapter will look at the main components of the “fascist minimum” – a revolutionary approach, ultra-nationalism, elimination of the internal and external threats and the notion of *palingenesis* which means the revival of the nation – and try to find the similarities and dissimilarities between fascism and Turkish authoritarianism.

Forms of Nationalism Inherited from the Late-Ottoman Era

This part of the chapter is composed of an assessment of the type of nationalism pursued by the Republican elite. As the aforementioned definition of fascism stated, nationalism, precisely its most aggressive and extreme form constitutes one of the major components of fascism. Nationalism was also an integral part of the Republican ideology right from its start. Republican People’s Party was born out of the nationalist resistance movement in Anatolia following the end of the First World War and the

¹⁹⁶ Ahmad, p. 67.

¹⁹⁷ Keyder, pp. 137-140.

invasion of the Empire by the Allied powers. In the initial phase of the resistance, which is known as the Turkish War of Independence (*Kurtuluş Savaşı*), the resistance fighters were called the Nationalist Forces (*Kuvay-i Milliye*). Later in April 1920, when the members of the Defence of Rights Group of Anatolia and Rumelia the leading organization of the War of Independence arrived to Ankara to form a parliament, their movement started to be known as the “nationalists”.¹⁹⁸ This movement was the precursor of the Republican People’s Party.

When the Republican People’s Party was officially established on September 9, 1923, nationalism was not among the principles of the party yet the concept of national sovereignty was mentioned in the first election bulletin of the party. In 1927, at the Second Grand Party Congress, it was declared that “the Republican People’s Party is a republican, populist, and nationalist political organization.”¹⁹⁹ With this announcement the party became the main representative of Turkish nationalism in the political sphere. For many observers, the Republican nationalism promoted “common linguistic, emotional, and cultural traits of the people” and did not have any ethnicity or race based connotations.²⁰⁰ This issue is debatable, and to better comprehend the Republican nationalism, different currents of nationalism which inherited from the late-Ottoman era must be discussed here first.

Nationalism in Turkey did not emerge with the Republican People’s Party. In fact, it did not emerge within the borders of the Ottoman Empire, either. Most prominent contributors to the idea of Turkish nationalism such as Ahmet Ağaoğlu,²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ It should be noted that in this phase of “national” struggle, the nation proposed by the resistance leaders had mostly Islamic and not ethnical connotations. The “nationalists” were not fighting solely for the Turkish “nation” but for the whole Muslim population of Anatolia. See Anscombe, pp. 183-184.

¹⁹⁹ First Article of the party regulations. See Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi (Ed.), *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi* (Ankara: TBMM Matbaası, 1927), p. 3.

²⁰⁰ Bila, *CHP: 1919-2009*, pp. 48-50.

²⁰¹ Ahmet Ağaoğlu (or Ahmet Bey Agayev) (1869-1939) was a politician, writer, journalist, and polemicist who was born in Susha, Azerbaijan. His nationalist activities started in his homeland Azerbaijan until he was forced to relocate in Istanbul in 1909. Here, Ağaoğlu became a prominent member of the nascent Turkist movement of the Ottoman Empire. Ağaoğlu also became a member of the Committee of the Union and Progress, served as a member at the Ottoman Parliament and became one of the founders of the nationalist organization; Turkish Hearths (*Türk Ocakları*). In 1919 he was sent to prison in Malta by the British occupying forces, before returning to Turkey and joining to the nationalist movement in Ankara in 1921. Between 1923 and 1931 Ağaoğlu served as a member of Grand Assembly from the Republican People’s Party. Ağaoğlu was a liberal, and in 1930 joined the ranks of Liberal Republican Party which was closed only after 90 days. Following the closure of the party, he did not return to the politics and remained as prominent figure of the opposition. Ağaoğlu’s nationalism was cultural, as a liberal he believed in parliamentary democracy and gave utter importance to Westernization. For more information on him, see A. Holly Shissler, *Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New*

Ismail Gasprinski,²⁰² and Yusuf Akçura,²⁰³ were all born in the Russian Empire. Simultaneously with them, in the post-*Tanzimat* Ottoman Empire, a nascent nationalism started to grow in search of replacing the crumbling Ottoman patriotism promoted by the Ottoman state. The most influential name of this form of nationalism in the Ottoman Empire was Ziya Gökalp. Due to the transparency of the intellectual boundaries between Ottoman and Russian Empires, the common language, and the circulation of the written material in a large Turkish-speaking area stretching from Kazan to Caucasus, from Crimea to Istanbul, these intellectuals influenced each other and the early form of Turkish nationalism, which was called Turkism (*Türkçülük*) came to existence in this intellectual intersection between these two empires.²⁰⁴ Although there were slight differences between the proposed programmes of each Turkist ideologue, the similarities outweighed these differences. Turkists commonly attached particular importance on the use of Turkish as the language of culture, education and administration. Another issue they placed special emphasis on was the need of extracting of a distinct Turkish identity from the Ottoman or Muslim supra-identities. The last characteristic of the Turkist movement was the concept of the ‘unity

Turkey (London: IB Tauris, 2002) and Ahmet Ağaoğlu, *Serbest Fırka Hatıraları* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1994 [1950]).

²⁰² İsmail Gaspralı (or Ismail Bey Gasprinski) (1851-1914) was a Tatar publisher and educator who was born in Crimea. He published *Tercüman* from 1883 on, which was one of the most influential journals in the Turkish speaking world. His political views were not geared on gaining independence from the Russian Empire, instead he advocated for the establishment of an ethno-national awareness, unity of action, and linguistic unity among Turks. Gasprinski’s Turkist views are most famously summed up in his slogan ‘Unity in Language, Thought and Deed’. His most crucial contribution to Turkism came in the sphere of education. He attributed special importance to education with modern instructional methods and with Turkish language as the medium of instruction. This type of education was known as the New Method (*Usul-i Cedid*) and became increasingly popular throughout the Muslim communities of Russia in the second half of the century. For more information on him, see A. Holly Shissler, *Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey* (London: IB Tauris, 2002), pp. 106-109.

²⁰³ Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935) was a Tatar author, historian and politician. Akçura was influenced by the Turkist publications of Gasprinski in his youth. In 1904, he wrote his famous article Three Policies (*Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset*), a fundamental work on the formation of Turkish nationalism. Akçura was also one of the founding members of the Turkish Hearths. After the establishment of the Republic, he became a parliament member, and later acted as the president of the Turkish Historical Society. For more information on Akçura, see Francois Georgeon, *Türk Milliyetçiliğinin Kökenleri: Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935)* (Istanbul: Türk Tarih Vakfı, 1996) and Yusuf Akçura, *Üç Tarz-ı Siyaset* (Ankara: TTK, 1991 [1904]).

²⁰⁴ Niyazi Berkes, in his eminent work “The Development of Secularism in Turkey” recognizes the importance of the Russian connection for the development of Turkish nationalism by stating that the nationalist ideology was heavily influenced “by the Turkish nationalist developments in Russia”. For the analysis of Berkes, see Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (New York: Routledge, 1998 [1964]), p. 322. For more information on the influence of the Turks of the Russian Empire on Turkism, see A. Holly Shissler, *Ahmet Ağaoğlu and the New Turkey* (London: IB Tauris, 2002). For more information on the formative period of Turkish nationalism, see Masami Arai, “Jön Türk Dönemi Türk Milliyetçiliği.” Mehmet O. Alkan (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce – Cilt 1: Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet’in Birikimi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001), pp. 180-196.

of the Turks'. This concept was far from being a monolithic ideology or strategy, instead it denoted to a combination of various meditations on the idea of unification of Turks, ranging from a possible political unity of the Turks of Ottoman and Russian Empires, to a softer union which was based on common culture and language.²⁰⁵ When the Turkish Republic was established, the first two issues were inherited by the Republican nationalism while the concept of the 'unity of the Turks' was completely abandoned.

Nearly all of the Turkist ideologues were incorporated into Republican regime in early 1920s, typically in significant positions. Ahmet Ağaoğlu was an influential and active parliament member, while Yusuf Akçura became the president of the Turkish Historical Society but among them, the most influential Turkist was Ziya Gökalp. Gökalp (1876-1924) was a sociologist, writer and politician. Recognized as the first Turkish sociologist, and "the father of Turkish nationalism", he was one of the most significant intellectuals of the late-Ottoman and early-Republican eras. Gökalp's ideology brought together elements of Turkish nationalism, modernism and Islamic identity and suggested that these concepts were not mutually exclusive. For Gökalp, belongingness to a certain nation could only be acquired by sharing the same culture, therefore ethnicity did not play an important role in his version of Turkish nationalism.²⁰⁶ Since he considered religion as an integral part of the national culture, Gökalp did not exclude Islam from his nationalism formulation. Similarly, he maintained that modernization while still being connected to the national culture, similar to the Japanese example of the Meiji Restoration, does not conflict with nationalism. Therefore, Gökalp summarized his brand of nationalism by defining the Turkish nation as belonging "to the Ural-Altai group of peoples, to the Islamic religious community, and to Western internationality".²⁰⁷ Gökalp's theses were important because it combined Westernization with nationalism which prepared a

²⁰⁵ 'The unity of the Turks' is also called as pan-Turkism, although in the contemporary political context pan-Turkism is strictly defined as a "political unity" of all Turks. For more information on pan-Turkism, see Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation* (London: Hurst & Company, 1981); and Günay Göksu Özdoğan, *Turan'dan Bozkurt'a Tek Parti Döneminde Türkçülük (1931-1946)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001).

²⁰⁶ Parla, Ziya Gökalp, *Kemalizm ve Türkiye'de Korporatizm*, p. 43.

²⁰⁷ For a collection of as Gökalp's most influential essays see, Ziya Gökalp, *Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı, 1976 [1929]) and *Turkish Nationalism and Western Civilization: Selected Essays of Ziya Gökalp*, trans., ed., intro. Niyazi Berkes (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). For an analysis of his ideology, see Uriel Heyd, *Foundations of Turkish Nationalism: The Life and Teachings of Ziya Gökalp* (London: Luzac, 1950) and Taha Parla, *The Social and Political Thought of Ziya Gökalp, 1876-1924* (Leiden: Brill, 1985).

blueprint for the Republican reforms. The emphasis that Gökalgp has placed on “Islamic identity” as an important part of the culture will not be developed further by the Republican nationalism.

Another influence on the Republican nationalism was the Turkish Hearths, the most influential organization of the late-Ottoman era Turkish nationalism which was established in 1912, in the relatively free environment of the Second Constitutional Era of the Ottoman Empire with a modernist, Turkist worldview. The approach of the Hearths towards the ‘unity of the Turks’ was perceived as ‘pan-Turkist’. For years, the Hearths had remained as the main organisation for the conceptualisation of Turkish nationalism. After 1908, Turkish Hearths were also supported by the CUP, the group that organized the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 which ushered the Second Constitutional Era and later became the ruling party of the Ottoman Empire in 1913. Many Turkist ideologues such as Gökalgp and Ağaoğlu were active both in the Turkish Hearths and the Committee of Union and Progress. Since the emergence of the Committee of the Union and Progress coincided with the rise of ethnic-nationalism of the various different ethnicities of the Ottoman Empire, the nationalism of the Hearths and the Committee employed a more ethno-nationalist language as well. Starting from their usurpation of power in 1913, this language turned into a series of nationalist policies. One of the crucial policies of this era which would be continued by the Republican regime was the Turkification of the economic sphere. The Committee of the Union and Progress tried to create a Muslim-Turkish bourgeoisie that would replace the influence of the non-Muslim Ottoman citizens had in the economic sphere.²⁰⁸ These policies continued and culminated in the First World War in which nearly 2.5 million Armenian and Greeks were massacred, expelled, or left the country.²⁰⁹

These were the nationalist elements inherited from the late-Ottoman era. Among the issues voiced by the early Turkists, the use of Turkish as the language of culture, education and administration and the need for the establishment of a new Turkish identity replacing the imperial identities became important aspects of the Republican nationalism as well. Similarly, Gökalgp’s theses that combined Westernization with nationalism prepared a blueprint for the Republican reforms. The

²⁰⁸ Toprak, *Turkiye’de Milli İktisat*, pp. 190-191.

²⁰⁹ Keyder, *State and Class in Turkey*, pp. 101-105.

policies of the CUP regarding creating a national economy by eliminating the non-Muslim minorities from the competition were also copied by the Republicans to some degree. Yet, although the Republican policies regarding the minorities were aggressive and exclusionary, they were not as destructive as the policies of the CUP due to several reasons. Most importantly, the ethnic composition of the late-Ottoman and Republican eras were completely different from each other. While, in 1906, 20 per cent of the Ottoman population were non-Muslims, in 1927 this ratio dropped to a mere 2.5 per cent which means that only 1/8 of the non-Muslims of the pre-war population continued to live in Turkey after the war. The rest of it either died in the war, were deported, massacred or voluntarily migrated to adjacent countries.²¹⁰ Therefore, the nationalist policies regarding the non-Muslim minorities did not need to be draconian during the Republican era. Instead of population exchange or mass killings Republican policies targeted to exclude these minorities from society.

Apart from these similarities there were important aspects of the late-Ottoman Turkish nationalism that were completely discarded by the Republicans. The most significant of these concepts was the 'unity of the Turks'. The Republican nationalism did not even entertain the idea of forming political or cultural alliances with the Turks living outside of Turkey. This change of attitude towards Turks that remained to live outside the borders of Turkey was based both on ideological and practical concerns. Ideologically, Atatürk regarded pan-Turkism as a needless adventure. Atatürk's nationalism was firmly grounded on the modern boundaries of Turkey. Any irredentist claims to form political unity with Turks of Russia are frowned upon by the Republican elite. During the Turkish War of Independence, as early as December 1921, Atatürk ruled out any possibility of pan-Turkism by stating that the objectives of the Ankara government were "modest" and "realistic" and uncontaminated from "vain hopes". Atatürk further stated that ideologies with grandiose, unrealistic objectives such as pan-Islamism and pan-Turkism were the very reasons of the disaster that struck the Ottoman Empire.²¹¹ Atatürk's objections to pan-Turkist ideas were part of his general aversion of the culture of conquest. One of the analyses of Atatürk regarding to 'Ottoman Decline' was the unrealistic and costly attempts to conquer more and more land. He criticized Ottoman bureaucrats and rulers, from the Grand Viziers who

²¹⁰ Ibid., pp. 102-104.

²¹¹ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 207.

tried to conquer Vienna, to the grandiose plans of expansion of the CUP for being out of touch with the realities. He stated that these attempts of expansion were economically costly, as well as being catastrophic due to severe losses of human lives. According to Atatürk, the Ottomans should have been settled with modest boundaries, and developed their own human resources to fulfil the potential of their available means of production instead of pursuing a “conquest economy”.²¹² Therefore the idea of merging all Turkish speaking people of the world through conquest was an unacceptable project for him.

A political union between all Turkish speaking people was also inconceivable for the Republican elite due to several practical reasons. The pan-Turkist current of the late-Ottoman Turkish nationalism was mostly originated from the Turks of Crimea, Caucasus, Azerbaijan, and Kazan, which were all within the boundaries of the Russian Empire. Politically Russian and Ottoman Empires were old enemies. Starting from the mid-17th century when the Russian Empire emerged as the main regional rival to the Ottomans in the Eastern Europe, these neighbouring countries have spent the last three centuries in an almost continuous war. Yet when the socialists overthrew the old regime in Russia in 1917, the pattern of relations changed. From 1918, Soviet Russia started to rebuild diplomatic relations with Turkey and after the establishment of the National Assembly in Ankara this process gained further momentum. The reconciliation with the Soviet regime was a necessity for the Ankara government to break the international isolation and to gain the much needed material help; mainly funds and armaments. The Ankara government, especially Mustafa Kemal was also planning to use the close relations with the Soviets as a bargaining chip against the Allied powers who were afraid of the proliferation of the socialism in the East. Kemal thought that a rapprochement with the Soviets would made the Allies more reluctant to use excessive amount of power when dealing with the nationalist insurgents of Ankara.

Mustafa Kemal wrote a letter to Lenin three days after the opening of the Grand National Assembly and proposed a co-operation between the two governments “against the imperialist powers”. Kemal asked funds, armaments, and provisions “to defeat the imperialist powers” and to strengthen “the joint struggle against imperialism

²¹² Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri II*, pp. 103-107.

in the future”.²¹³ In the same letter, he went even a step further and offered the help of the armed forces of the Ankara government to secure the southern borders of Soviet Russia. The offer included helping the Red Army to install a socialist government in Azerbaijan. This was a complete diversion from the pan-Turkist objectives of the late-Ottoman Turkish nationalist ideologues who extensively wrote and campaigned for a political union of all Turks. The letter proves that for Atatürk, securing Soviet help in this crucial stage of the War of Independence clearly outweighed the opportunity of establishing a union with the Turks of Azerbaijan. This letter was followed by establishing new socialist committees all over Ankara to gain the sympathy of the Soviets to the nationalist cause. After Ankara managed to gain significant military victories, Soviets came to the conclusion that the nationalist movement of Ankara would be a useful ally for them and, on March 16, 1921, Treaty of Moscow was signed between the two sides. Shortly after the agreement Soviet help started to pour in. In total, until the end of the war, ten per cent of the national defence budget of the nationalist movement would be provided by the Soviets.²¹⁴ This coalition would continue throughout the early years of the Republic in various different spheres. Economically, the five-year plan implemented in 1934 was prepared by the Soviets who were experienced in statist policies. The Soviet Union also donated money for the implementation of the plan. Diplomatically, the relations remained healthy as well. In 1935 a treaty of friendship which remained in effect for 10 years was signed between the two countries. A most telling example of the productive relations between these two countries is visible at the Monument of the Republic (*Cumhuriyet Anıtı*) which is located at the Taksim Square in Istanbul. The monument which was built in 1928, depicted important names of the War of Independence including Atatürk, İnönü and Chief of General Staff Fevzi Çakmak, as well as the Soviet allies of the Ankara government namely Mikhail Frunze, the Red Army commander and Minister of Defence who visited Ankara in 1921 and his successor Klim Voroshilov. The existence of this monument was a prime example of the sound relationship between the Soviet Union and Republican Turkey. Therefore, one can assume that pursuing a

²¹³ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'un Tamim, Telgraf ve Beyannameleri IV* (Ankara: AAM, 2006 [1964]), p. 318.

²¹⁴ During the Turkish War of Independence, Soviet aid included eleven million golden Rubles, gold bullions worth of 100.000 Turkish Liras, and arms and ammunitions to fully equip four divisions of the nationalist army. See Alptekin Müderrisoğlu, “Kurtuluş Savaşının Mali Kaynakları.” *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi: Atatürk Yolu*. Vol. 4, No. 13 (1994), p. 51.

pan-Turkist policy which could have jeopardized the relations between the two countries was out of question for the Republican elite for both ideological and practical reasons.

Among the inheritance of the late-Ottoman era Turkish nationalism, another concept which was rejected by the Republican elite was the importance attributed to the contribution of the Islamicate culture to the Turkish national identity. Instead, the policies of the Republic tended to create a secular version of nationalism, and the new Turkish identity they established did not include any references to Islam.²¹⁵ In fact, as an alternative to the Islamicate past, the glories of pre-Islamic Turkish society were promoted and at times, even had to be manufactured. Therefore among the different forms of nationalisms inherited from the late-Ottoman era, the Republican regime opted for a nationalism which was geared towards establishing a new, modern, secular Turkish identity. Expansionism, irredentism, pan-Turkism or neo-Ottomanism were all rejected. The supporters of the latter theories were all incorporated into the regime and they became committed Republican nationalists. For instance, the Turkish Hearths, the largest nationalist organization, renounced their pan-Turkist tenets. In 1927, they were categorised as “establishments under government supervision” before being closed down permanently in 1931, the same year of the official establishment of the single-party regime in Turkey. At the time of their closure, the Hearths were the largest voluntary organization in Turkey with 267 centres and 32.000 registered members.²¹⁶ The regime also confiscated their properties and opened up People’s Houses (*Halkevleri*); ideological instruments directly controlled by the party centre. Following the demise of the Hearths, the nationalist scene in Turkey started to be dominated by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk’s own vision of Turkish nationalism.

The Ideology of the Republican Nationalism

The first set of principles announced by Mustafa Kemal as a party programme in April 1923, which was known as the Nine Principles (*Dokuz Umde*) did not include any

²¹⁵ Although Republican nationalism was secular in theory, in practice non-Muslim minorities were constantly discriminated against but these practices did not have a religious agenda. They were shaped by the memories of the First World War and the conception of non-Muslims as potential agents of foreign powers.

²¹⁶ Üstel, “Türk Ocakları.”, pp. 263-266.

reference to nationalism but in October 1927, at the Second Congress of the Republican People's Party, nationalism was recognised as one of the four main principles of the party. Party regulations also emphasized the importance of unity of language, and the necessity of the establishment of common feelings and thoughts among the members of the Turkish nation. The regulations which also acted as a party programme show that at this phase, the nationalism of the ruling party was not based on ethnicity or race. Furthermore, the regulations clearly defined the roadmap of the Republican nationalism by stating that one of the main aims of the party was to make the use of Turkish language widespread in the entire Turkey and develop Turkish language and culture.²¹⁷ These regulations display that the Republican elite perceived nationhood very similar to Gökalp and highlighted the importance of the common culture and language, yet they discarded the significance of the common religion from Gökalp's original formula. Additionally, the party programme pointed out that the regime would actively seek to promote Turkish language and culture, although the methods which would be used in this endeavour were not clearly defined back then.

Gökalp's influence on Republican nationalism is visible in other important documents of the era, as well. In 1930, Atatürk defined the elements which constituted nationhood as; union in thought, morality, sentiment, and sensation; common memories, traditions, history and language; and a will to live together.²¹⁸ Similarly, in another writing from the same era, culture once again came to the fore as the most important part of nationhood as he defined nation as "a society which consisted of people who share a common culture."²¹⁹ This approach was further solidified in the party programme of 1931. Second article of the programme described nation as "a political and social group consisting of citizens who are bonded to each other through common language, culture and ideals." This definition as well denoted no racial or ethnic elements in the Republican conception of nationhood.²²⁰ These examples show that ethnic connotations were minimal in the nationalist rhetoric of the early Republican period.

²¹⁷ *Cumhuriyet Halk Fırkası Nizamnamesi*, 1927, p. 4.

²¹⁸ Afet İnan, *Medeni Bilgiler ve Mustafa Kemal Atatürk'ün El Yazıları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 1969), p. 23.

²¹⁹ Genelkurmay Başkanlığı (Ed.), *Atatürkçülük, Cilt I: Atatürk'ün Görüş ve Direktifleri* (Ankara: Milli Eğitim, 1988), p. 47.

²²⁰ *CHP Nizamnamesi ve Programı*, 1931, p. 30.

According to many observers, in this early phase, Republican nationalism was a form of civic nationalism, which put special emphasis on the importance of sharing common land and culture and avoided mentioning ethnicity, religion and race.²²¹ According to civic nationalism, a nation should be composed by all members of the society, regardless of their race, colour, creed, gender, language or ethnicity. This type of nationalism envisages the nation as a community of equal right-bearing citizens; their union is formed voluntarily by the recognition that the self-interest of each citizen could only be achieved through by a commitment to the common good.²²² The civic nation is an association of equal citizens. This citizenship is based on “*jus soli*” principle²²³ and therefore membership in the nation is in some sense open. On the other hand, “ethnic” nationalism emphasizes common descent and cultural sameness. In this type of nationalism membership to a nation is exclusive. Pre-existing characteristics of the citizens, such as their language, religion, customs and traditions give the unity to the nation.²²⁴ The nation is a given, it is almost a “fate from which none may escape.”²²⁵ In this model, citizenship is acquired “*jus sanguinis*”; or by blood.

After the Third Grand Party Congress of 1931 the civic nationalist stance of the Republican regime started to slowly change and references to ethnicity increased in frequency. According to Aktar, the Republican nationalism of the 1930s represented a significant departure from Gökalt because its priority was no longer common culture, but the common “ethnic” background.²²⁶ On the other hand, according to Bora, Republican nationalism did not undergo the mentioned transition. Bora imagines nationalism in Turkey as a nebula that was composed of different types of nationalism which were embraced by different classes and social actors. Bora states that Turkish nationalism used all kinds of nationalist forms, sometimes picking one of them as the

²²¹ For an example of this approach, see Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği*, pp. 41-50.

²²² Ümit Özkırımlı, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (London: Palgrave, 2005), p. 26.

²²³ *Jus soli* (right of the soil) is the legal principle of that nationality is determined by virtue of being born within or of living in the territories of a state. See Philip Spencer and Howard Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage, 2002), p. 101

²²⁴ Özkırımlı, *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism*, p. 26.

²²⁵ Spencer & Wollman, *Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, p. 101

²²⁶ Ayhan Aktar, “*Cumhuriyet Türkiye’si ve Irkçılık-Turancılık*.” Presentation given in Istanbul, 2005. For similar examples, see Rifat N. Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri: Bir Türkleştirme Serüveni (1923–1945)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1999); Taha Parla, *Kemalist Tek-Parti İdeolojisi ve CHP’nin Altı Ok’u* (Istanbul: İletişim, 1995); and Mesut Yeğen, “Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30:1 (2007), pp. 119-151.

valid form of nationalism and shaping it according to its needs, but other forms continued their existence, they would never be dismissed, they could be brought back and used again in the processes of building a national identity. The Turkish national identity was constructed through accepting, disapproving, changing, transforming these types of nationalities and through finding the middle ground between them. Bora lists these types of nationalism as; a nationalism based on ethnicity and modernization, which was originated from the Turks of Russia; an utopian pan-Turkism; an anti-imperialist national independence movement; a nationalist, alarmist movement emerged in reaction to the loss of territory during the Balkan Wars and had concerns for the survival of the nation; a form of civic nationalism; the Islamist modernism which envisaged the 'nation' as a Muslim community; a reactionary peasantry who despised non-Muslims; and the concerns of the notables who had seized the lands and goods of the Armenians and Greeks during the First World War and therefore wanted an ethnically cleansed society. Bora states that during the War of Independence, all of these nationalist elements co-existed. After the war a definite identity was built from this complicated bundle due to the need of building a homogenous nation. Therefore a rather "ambivalent" national identity emerged after this process. On one side it was a political-legal definition which highlighted the importance of citizenship and the common homeland. On the other hand, it was an essentialist definition based on the ethnicity which was sanctified due to its "uniqueness." Bora concluded his theory by stating that there was a constant tension between these definitions and the second definition was always the dominant one.²²⁷

Although Bora's elaborate definition is a valuable explanation of the idiosyncrasies of the Turkish nationalism, the transition from a civic form of nationalism to a more ethnic one is visible in the deeds of the single-party and the speeches of the party notables. A speech given by Ali Fuad Başgil at the Second Congress of the Turkish Historical Society provides clues about the increasing ethnic elements of Republican nationalism. Başgil denied the civic nature of nationalism and stated that the elements which build a nation were not just "spiritual elements like the

²²⁷ Tanıl Bora, "İnşa Döneminde Türk Milli Kimliği." *Toplum ve Bilim* 71 (1996), pp. 172-173. For a similar approach on the multiple faces of Turkish nationalism, see Mesut Yeğen, "Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30:1, pp. 119-151. Here Yeğen lists five different types of Turkish nationalism ranging from extreme far-right nationalism to mainstream secular nationalism that competed with each other.

desire to live together or material elements like the unity in language and blood, but a synthesis of all these elements.” According to him, the Turkish nation was composed of Turkish speakers, people with “Turkish blood in their veins,” or people “who believe that they are from Turkish stock” coming from a shared historical background, sharing the common feelings and culture.²²⁸

Although references to blood and ethnicity started to dominate the Republican nationalism discourse of the 1930s, – examples included idioms such as the saying “the worst Turk is better than the best one of the non-Turks” of Mahmut Esat Bozkurt,²²⁹ one of the main ideologues of the era along with Peker, and Peker himself, who attributed the survival of the Turks in the First World War to the “purity of their blood”²³⁰ –, this ethnic nationalism was not transformed into biological racism but it was not reverted back to civic nationalism, either. A telling example of the ethnicist policies of the regime the regulations concerning the military schools. According to these regulations, being a Turkish citizen would not suffice for being accepted to the military schools since “being from the pure Turkish blood” was inserted into the regulation as a prerequisite, as well, to ban especially non-Muslim Turks.²³¹ Despite this increasing ethnicist attitude, Republican nationalism was not exclusionary to Muslim minorities, but it was assimilationist.

Republican elite had a vision; an ideal Turkish identity, in mind when establishing this assimilation process. According to the Republican policies, an ideal Turk speaks Turkish, is a member of the westernized Turkish culture, wholeheartedly accepts the principles of the Republic and, preferably, has Turkish origins.²³² If any citizen failed to observe one of these features, he or she had to find a way to be promoted to full-citizenship. Measures which could be used for this promotion were various. For example, the most significant prerequisite wanted from the Jewish people

²²⁸ Ali Fuat Başgil, “*Türk Milliyetçiliği*.” Presentation given in the Second Congress of Turkish History, 1937.

²²⁹ Mahmut Esat Bozkurt (1892-1943) was a politician, jurist and author. A member of the most inner circle of Atatürk, he continuously served as a parliament member from 1920 until the end of his life. As a famous lawyer who participated in the drafting of Civil Code, Penal Code and the Code of Commerce (1926), Bozkurt served as the Minister of Justice from 1924 to 1930. In political sphere, Bozkurt represented the most aggressive contingent of Turkish nationalism. His attitude towards the minorities often bordered racism. For Bozkurt’s interpretation of the Republican ideology, see Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, *Atatürk İhtilali* (Istanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1940). For an overview of his ideology, see Hakkı Uyar, *Sol Milliyetçi Bir Türk Aydını – Mahmut Esat Bozkurt* (Istanbul: Büke, 2000).

²³⁰ Bora, “İnşa Döneminde Türk Milli Kimliği.”, pp. 179-180.

²³¹ Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği*, pp. 157-159.

²³² Yıldız, “Kemalist Milliyetçilik”, p. 232.

for being “proper” Turks was the adoption of the Turkish language instead of their native language, Ladino.²³³ Republican nationalism was ready to accept people from different ethnicities into the Turkish nation after being assimilated. It was only hostile and exclusionary to the people who refused to be assimilated. Furthermore, although being a type of ethnic nationalism, Republican nationalism was different from racism because ethnicity corresponded to an anthropological and sociological category without any biological reference point. This type of nationalism did not describe a certain type of Turk with specific racial features. Race has never been a criterion for being a Turk. Even the most extremely nationalistic law of the era, the Settlement Law of 1934 defined “proper” Turkish nationals as “devoted to Turkish culture.”²³⁴

An interesting characteristic of the Republican nationalism of this era is its relations with the religious minorities of Turkey. As mentioned above, the Republican elite discarded the importance of Islam from Gökalp’s formula. Unlike Gökalp who defined religion as the common conscience of society, for Republican nationalism, religious unity between people was not a prerequisite for nationhood. Atatürk himself stated that Turks had not formed a nation with the Arabs even though they had lived together for hundreds of years and therefore concluded that religious unity did not necessarily unite people to form a nation. Although in theory Republican nationalism was a secular form of nationalism, in practice the members of the non-Muslim minorities²³⁵ were always discriminated against. Paradoxically for a proudly secular polity, during the assimilation process the Republican elite closely associated Turkishness with Islam.²³⁶ For the non-Muslims, the path for gaining full membership to the Turkish nation was always trickier. The actions of the Republican regime show that although secularism was constantly promoted by the state, there was always a distinction between ‘citizenship’; a more formal, and almost an obligatory relationship between the state and the citizens which was mostly reserved for non-Muslim Turks,

²³³ Ladino, or Judeo-Spanish, is the language of the Sephardic Jews, who fled from Spain and Portugal during the Spanish Inquisition and especially after the issuance of the Decree of Expulsion of Jews in 1492. The core of Ladino is medieval Spanish and to a lesser extent the other languages of the Iberian Peninsula. Over the centuries, Ladino was enriched with words from Turkish, and Hebrew, as well as from Greek, Italian, French, Bulgarian, and Arabic.

²³⁴ For the entire text of the law, see *Resmî Gazete*, No. 2733 (July 21, 1936), Law No. 2510, p. 4003.

²³⁵ In this chapter, Alevism which is a syncretic belief system is not grouped with non-Muslim minorities. Alevism as a distinct belief system is discussed in detail in Chapter 4 of this study.

²³⁶ Kemal Kirişçi and Gareth Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey: An Example of a Trans-state Ethnic Conflict* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 101-103.

and ‘membership to Turkish nation’; an almost sacred bond between the state and the members of the nation which was strictly reserved for Muslims.

According to Bora, a non-Muslim could only be a legal ‘citizen’. Full membership to nationhood was strictly reserved for Muslims. Without being a Turk in spirit and at heart, the state could at most ‘tolerate’ a non-Muslim.²³⁷ Even Atatürk, a deeply secular person, repeatedly used phrases such as “the Christian and Jewish citizens of our land” instead of recognizing identities such as Christian-Turk or Jewish-Turk.²³⁸ Similarly Peker similarly stated in one of his lectures that the single-party recognized “these [Christian and Jewish] citizens as full Turks, on condition that they participate in what we have just expressed, the unity in language and in ideals.”²³⁹

For the Republican elite, non-Muslims were not Turks, but Turkish citizens; they belonged to the state, not to the Turkish nation. Seeking a religious unity with other Muslim countries and people, or pursuing Islamist policies were unacceptable for the Republicans, but internally the religious unity was important. The Muslims living outside the boundaries of Turkey were never considered as members of the Turkish nation, yet similarly, the non-Muslims living inside the boundaries were not easily promoted to being Turks, mainly because the relations with the non-Muslims were shaped by the memories of the late Ottoman era, First World War and the War of Independence. One can assume that due to the separatist movements of Armenian and Greek nationalists, and the perceived hostile attitude of the minorities taken during the nationalist resistance in Anatolia after the First World War, the non-Muslim minorities were deemed untrustworthy by the ruling elite. Although Republican nationalism was secular in theory, in practice non-Muslim minorities were constantly discriminated against. Yet, these practices did not have a religious agenda but they were shaped by the memories of the past and the conception of non-Muslims as potential agents of foreign powers.

The assimilationist policies of the Republican elite are described as *Turkification*. Aktar defines Turkification as the “uncompromising exertion of the

²³⁷ Bora, “İnşa Döneminde Türk Milli Kimliği.”, pp. 181-182.

²³⁸ İnan, *Medeni Bilgiler*, p. 23. This approach is still traceable in modern Turkish political terminology. The state authorities constantly describe the non-Muslims of Turkey with phrases such as “Our Armenian citizens” or “Our Jewish citizens.” Proper definitions like Armenian-Turkish or Jewish-Turkish are never used by the state.

²³⁹ Soner Çağaptay, “Reconfiguring the Turkish nation in the 1930s.” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 8:2 (2002), pp. 67-82

Turkish ethnic identity's authority over every aspect of social life including the language used in the streets, history taught in schools, education policies, economic life, trade, personnel recruitment regime, private law and settlement policies includes relocation of minorities to some regions.”²⁴⁰ Turkification was not a form of racism, which was at its peak in Europe during the 1930s. Racism seeks to restrict the membership to a nation solely of people belonging to the same racial background, thus it is exclusionist. Turkification, on the other hand, tried to expand the scope of Turkishness, thus it presented itself as inclusive. Racism tried to reduce the size of a nation by excluding people from different races, whereas on the contrary Turkification tries to increase it by melting the cultural identities of people into a single Turkishness. For Republican nationalism, the concept of ‘we’ referred to a constantly increasing group of people belonging to this single Turkish identity. As mentioned above, while every Muslim living inside the borders of Turkey was referred as Turkish, the non-Muslims were the only ones who stood out as ‘others.’ Perceived as foreigners and potential threats to the Republic, the non-Muslims of Turkey lived in a constant state of fear, alienation and isolation as half and restricted citizens. Therefore, in summary, Turkification was a mixture of inclusive (for Muslims) and exclusionist (for non-Muslims) policies.

The Republican nationalism, as an ideology, can be defined as a fusion of civic nationalist elements; such as the significance attributed to common culture and ethnic nationalist elements, which were traceable especially in the policies targeting the minorities. Especially after 1931, and in synchronicity with increasing ethnic nationalist attitudes of the regime, assimilationist policies were intensified. During this era, citizens were expected to leave every single form of previously held identities, whether linguistic, ethnic or tribal and truly embrace the new national identity dictated by the regime. This policy is especially discriminatory towards the religious minorities.

The Policies of Republican Nationalism

As mentioned above, Turkification was a mixture of inclusive (mostly for Muslims) and exclusionist (mostly for non-Muslims) policies. Inclusive policies aimed for the

²⁴⁰ Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi*, p. 101.

assimilation of the minorities. The first stage of assimilation was denying the existence of diverse cultural and linguistic traits of the Muslim minorities and claiming that they were already Turks. A perfect example of this approach is visible in the governmental reports on the Kurdish and Zaza communities living in the eastern part of Turkey. For instance, available government and military reports from this era continuously called the Dersimi people who spoke Dimili; a Western Iranian language and adhered to the Alevi belief system as “original” Turks²⁴¹ who were originated from the Khorasan region in North-Eastern Iran and Central Asia – the ancestral homeland of Anatolian people according to Republican nationalism –, and were linguistically and religiously Persianized due to close relations and proximity with Iran. For example, a parliamentary report from this period called Dersimis “hundred per cent Turks”, who were Persianized and “forgot their Turkishness” in this process.²⁴² For Republican nationalism, Kurds and Zazas were not unwanted ethnicities. In fact they were promising candidates for the Turkification process. After all, as the report stated, all they had to do was “to be reminded of their own Turkishness”. This report was in accordance with the lectures of Recep Peker, who similarly stated that minorities such as Kurds, Circassians and Lazes “had the wrong idea” of belonging to these identities which were “imposed on them” and commented that the duty of the Republic was “to correct these false conceptions”.²⁴³

The methods used by the Republican elite for this task were varied from indoctrination through education to forced relocation of certain groups. One telling example of the assimilation politics is the “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” campaign which started in 1927 and resumed throughout the 1930s at certain intervals. The campaign aimed to make Turkish the only acceptable public language in Turkey. Although the campaign targeted mainly Jewish Turks who traditionally spoke Ladino,²⁴⁴ Muslim minorities also suffered from its results. The campaign became more popular in mid-1930s, especially in places like Izmir, which had a healthy Jewish population.²⁴⁵ The Jews of Izmir, acted before any enforcements, took the lead themselves and joined to

²⁴¹ “Öz Türk” in Turkish.

²⁴² For the report, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...23. For a recently published booklet version of the report, see Hasan Reşit Tankut, *Zazalar Üzerine Sosyolojik Tetkikler* (Ankara: Kalan, 2000).

²⁴³ Çağaptay, “Reconfiguring the Turkish Nation in the 1930s.”, pp. 67-82

²⁴⁴ For more information on this campaign, see Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*; Senem Aslan, “Citizen, Speak Turkish!”: A Nation in the Making.” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol 13:2 (2007), pp. 245-272.; and Çağaptay, “Race, Assimilation and Kemalism.”, pp. 86-101.

²⁴⁵ 10 percent of the population of the city was Jewish at the time.

the campaign voluntarily. Similarly, Jewish communities of Thrace, Bursa, Ankara, Diyarbakir and lastly, Istanbul decided to support the campaign.²⁴⁶ Although the campaigns were non-compulsory, in some other cities and town Turks pressured the Jews to make them speak Turkish in public. Other minorities which were affected by this harassment were Arabs, Circassians, migrants from Crete whose language was Greek although they were Muslims, and Kurds.

Prime Minister İnönü made a fervid speech in the party congress of 1935 which emphasized the importance of speaking Turkish in the public sphere. He said that the government “will not keep quiet on this problem anymore,” and added that, “from now on all ‘citizens’ who are living ‘with us’ will be speaking Turkish.”²⁴⁷ Following this speech the National Turkish Students Union (*Millî Türk Talebe Birliği*); an organization which showed considerable interest in Fascism, started a new, more intolerant campaign.²⁴⁸ People speaking languages other than Turkish were harassed in the streets.²⁴⁹ The fiercest reactions targeted Jews. In the end ordinances were issued by most of the municipalities that possessed large Jewish populations to fine people who used languages other than Turkish in public, thus implementing a de facto ban on non-Turkish languages.²⁵⁰ In summary, in 1930s, speaking in a language other than Turkish had become almost impossible in public due to the risk of harassment and municipal restrictions.

Another example of the exclusive side of the Republican nationalism is apparent in the Law on Arts and Employments allotted to Turkish Citizens (*Türkiye’de Türk Vatandaşlarına Tahsis Edilen Sanat ve Hizmetler Hakkında Kanun*), which was issued on June 4, 1932. With the enactment of this law, some lines of work became forbidden to non-citizen minorities. The act was aimed to force Greek people who as

²⁴⁶ Çağaptay, “Race, Assimilation and Kemalism.”, p. 95.

²⁴⁷ Soner Çağaptay, “Otuzlarda Türk Milliyetçiliğinde Irk, Dil ve Etnisite”, Tanıl Bora (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce – Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2002), p. 260.

²⁴⁸ This union was closed down by the government in 1936 due to its ties with international fascism and pan-Turkism which was rejected by the Republican nationalism. For more information on the Union, see M. Çağatay Okutan, *Bozkurt’tan Kur’an’a Millî Türk Talebe Birliği, 1916-1980* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2004).

²⁴⁹ Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, pp. 136-7.

²⁵⁰ Klaus Kreiser and Christoph H. Neumann, *Kleine Geschichte der Türkei* (Stuttgart: Philipp Reclam, 2003), p. 307. It should be noted that the fines were implemented strictly by the municipalities without any governmental control and at some occasions the government tried to stop the municipalities from fining the non-Turkish speakers. For instance, Bali points out that the Ministry of Interior sent a notice to the municipality of Istanbul ordering it not to impose any fines on non-Turkish speakers. See Bali, *Cumhuriyet Yıllarında Türkiye Yahudileri*, p. 280.

an exemption had not been forced to leave the country during the population exchange 1923 and had obtained the right to stay and work in Istanbul.²⁵¹ As a result of the law, nearly 15,000 Greeks were fired from their jobs and roughly 9000 of them migrated to Athens. The categories of occupations described by the government as ‘strategically important’ and thus not suitable for ‘foreigners’ were jobs like being a chauffeur or a janitor. For the government these born and raised Istanbulites could threaten ‘public safety’ if they continued to work in these ‘strategically important’ professions. This example and many more show us the rather paranoid tendencies of the regime.²⁵² For the ruling elite, the non-Muslims had already betrayed the nation by cooperating with the enemies during the days following the First World War, and by having prospered. This image was so strongly engraved in their memory; they were unable to accept non-Muslims as ‘true’ Turks although the majority of non-Muslims tried to go along with the Turkification process themselves.²⁵³

In the single-party era, two significant events proved to be extremely devastating for the religious minorities.²⁵⁴ These were the Thrace Incidents of 1934 in which the Jewish population of Thrace region fled to Istanbul to escape from intimidation and the introduction of the Wealth Tax (*Varlık Vergisi*) in 1942 which led to the demise of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie of Turkey. The Thrace incidents of 1934 include the looting of Jewish properties in the cities of Çanakkale, Edirne, Kırklareli, Tekirdağ and their affiliated towns, the attempts to force Jews to leave the region through violence, intimidation and harassment, and sell their properties at bargain prices before they fled,²⁵⁵ boycotting Jewish shops,²⁵⁶ and in some cases, even

²⁵¹ For the text of the law, see *Resmî Gazete*, No. 2126 (June 16, 1932), Law No. 2007, p. 512.

²⁵² Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*, pp. 114-116. Some similar examples to the exclusionary policies towards the religious minorities were: Act concerning Civil Servants (1926) which blocked non-Muslims from entering to civil service, the Surname Law (1934) which prevented non-Muslims to take surnames in their respective languages, the regulations announced in July 1938 which prevented non-Muslims from becoming military officers and the establishment of labour battalions from the non-Muslim conscripts during the Second World War. For an overview of these policies, see Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*; M. Çağatay Okutan, *Tek Parti Döneminde Azınlık Politikaları* (Istanbul: Bilgi Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2009); and Baskın Oran, *Türkiye’de Azınlıklar, Kavramlar – Teori, Lozan, İç mevzuat, İçtihat, Uygulama* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2004)

²⁵³ Rıfat N. Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 2008), pp. 5-6.

²⁵⁴ It should be noted that almost the entire secondary literature concerning the religious minorities is about the officially recognized minorities of Jews, Armenians and Greeks. The problems of the people who adhere to the ancient Eastern churches such as Assyrians, Chaldeans and Nestorians are rarely discussed in academia.

²⁵⁵ Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, p. 126.

²⁵⁶ The main slogan of the boycotters was “*Türkten Alışveriş Yap!*” – “Buy only from Turks,” which was similar to the boycott slogans used by Nazis. See Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, p. 121.

public beatings and rape. The incidents were started on June 21, 1934 and were only stopped after Prime Minister İnönü's condemnation of the events in July 5, 1934. To punish the perpetrators of the crimes, the Republican regime closed the anti-Semite periodicals, arrested the local notables who profited from the events and dismissed the mayor of Kırklareli. Looted goods were given back to their rightful owners, but no reparations were paid to the Jews to compensate for the damage and no precautions were made to facilitate the safe-return of the Thracian Jews to their lands after the events. The incidents affected roughly 20,000 of the Jews residing in Thrace. According to Levi, nearly 10,000 of them fled to Istanbul, some of them eventually returned to Thrace after the incidents finished, but most of them decided to stay in Istanbul or to migrate to foreign countries, including Palestine. The refugees who came to Istanbul after the attacks did not get any help from the government or any other official institution, but relied on the help of the Jewish community of Istanbul. Some perpetrators, including the mayor and chief constable of Kırklareli, were tried in courts, and others were fined. Only one person lost his life during the incidents; a gendarmerie corporal killed by the looters while trying to protect the Jews.²⁵⁷

It is difficult to pinpoint the exact reason of the events but from the available sources one can assume instead of being resulted from the direct orders of the government, the events unfolded from a variety of interrelated factors. These can be summarized as; the agitations of racist publications²⁵⁸ and anti-Semite writers,²⁵⁹ the

²⁵⁷ Anver Levi, "1934 Trakya Yahudileri Olayı: Alınmayan Ders." *Tarih ve Toplum*, Vol. 151 (July 1996), pp. 10-17.

²⁵⁸ *Milli İnkılap* (National Revolution) was the most influential of these publications. This anti-Semite periodical was a carbon copy of the infamous Nazi publication "*Der Stürmer*." Its owner, Cevat Rifât Atilhan acquired materials to print from Julius Streicher, the owner of the aforementioned Nazi publication. For this periodical, Atilhan translated important articles published in the *Stürmer* into Turkish and added articles written by pro-German Turks who had lived in Germany. Well before the incidents, the Jewish authorities registered a complaint about the magazine but they obtained no result from it. Only after the physical attacks against the Jews, and the following media reports, *Milli İnkılap* was closed and the publisher Atilhan was put under investigation. For more information, see Anver Levi, "1934 Trakya Yahudileri Olayı: Alınmayan Ders." *Tarih ve Toplum*, Vol. 151 (July 1996), pp. 10-17.

²⁵⁹ Shortly before the start of the incidents, Hüseyin Nihâl Atsız (1905-1975), the most prominent anti-Semite pan-Turkist of the Republican history worked as a school teacher at the Edirne High School in Thrace. Here he published far-right periodical *Orhun* and tried to disseminate his racist ideology among the locals. After the events, *Orhun* was closed but Atsız continued to work as a high school teacher in Istanbul and started to publish the journal again in 1943. According to Bali, his significant presence in Edirne and the availability of his periodical throughout the region should not be ignored as a contributing factor to the events. For more information on his activities in Thrace, see Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 360-374. For a brief overview of his ideology, see Güven Bakırezer, "Nihâl Atsız." Tanıl Bora (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasal Düşünce – Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2002), pp. 352-357.

increasing Nazi influence, the insufficiency or the unwillingness of the local authorities and the government to protect the Jewish people and their properties, the military concerns of the ruling elite against the Italian threat and the banal anti-Semitism and economic concerns of the local Muslims who wanted to take over the place of Jewish landowners and bourgeoisie of the region.²⁶⁰ All of these reasons played their parts in the violent attacks but some of them seem to be less significant than the others. For instance, the Nazi connection seems to be far-fetched idea²⁶¹ and the influence of the racist publications should not be overestimated since the distributing network of these publications seem to be quite inadequate to cause a provocation of such calibre.²⁶²

On the other hand the acts of the local authorities and the government do need a more thorough inspection. Although, as mentioned above, the government did its best to punish the perpetrators after the events, some scholars claim that they passively supported the attacks by not preventing them which means that the events were materialized within the administration's knowledge and guidance. Aktar, one of the supporters of this theory claims that the fact that the incidents erupted simultaneously in Thrace, far from Istanbul and Ankara, gives the impression that they were not unrelated events which were perpetrated by individual pillagers. For him, the attacks were controlled from a central authority. Aktar further defends his theory by claiming that the government, and Atatürk himself who met with the leaders of the Jewish community of the region were well aware of their complaints. The question about why the government did not act sooner and waited until July 4, remains as a meaningful

²⁶⁰ Bali claims that the Muslim people of the region were extremely jealous of the wealth of the Jews and this banal anti-Semitism was magnified by the People's Houses and the "Citizen, Speak Turkish!" campaigns. For a summary of the situation in Thrace before the events and the Muslim-Jewish relations, see Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 21-117.

²⁶¹ Levi claims that Nazi influence was the main reason for the events. For Levi, these incidents had been influenced by reports of the Night of the Long Knives, the Nazi purge which took place on June 30, 1934. He claims that, on July 2, Turkish newspapers reported the events that had occurred in Germany in great detail and one day later, the attacks on Jews started in Thrace. Although Levi builds a connection between these events, they were not very similar, since the Night of the Long Knives was a purge aimed to cleanse potential rivals of Hitler, including Röhm, Von Schleicher and Strasser while the Thrace incidents were attacks targeted at the Jewish community. For Levi's claim, see Levi, pp. 10-17.

²⁶² Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*, p. 81. On the other hand, Bali states that the influences of racist periodicals such as *Orhun* and *Milli İnkılap* cannot be completely ignored. Bali blames the mainstream media as well, since he believes that the type of banal anti-Semitism existed in the form of comic strips and jokes in mainstream newspapers about the uncleanness, greediness, selfishness and deceptiveness of the Jews contributed to the mood of the participators of the events. See Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 360-374.

question, although Aktar's claims are not fully based on evidences, but only on well-directed assumptions.²⁶³

Another factor that implies government guidance in the attacks was the military concerns of the regime. In 1934, Republican leadership was wary of the two expansionist powers which threatened Turkey. These were Italy, which was led by Mussolini who envisaged establishing a new Roman Empire in the Mediterranean basin and Bulgaria, which harboured irredentist claims in the Balkans.²⁶⁴ Thrace region, which shared borders with both zones of expansion of the irredentist powers was seen as an extremely important military zone for the regime. Considering that the Republican perception of the non-Muslim minorities were shaped from their wartime experiences, the possibility of that the Jewish people of the region were started to be seen as a potential threat to national security by the regime should not be underestimated. A typical example of this approach is traceable in a report prepared by İbrahim Talî Öngören,²⁶⁵ the Inspector-General of the region. Öngören was in the region for his periodical inspections between May 6 and June 7. In his report, which was presented to the Prime Ministry, Interior Ministry and Party Secretariat on June 23, – right before the events – Öngören wrote that the wealth of the Jewish businessmen and tradesmen in comparison to the wealth of the Muslims constituted a serious problem that had to be solved. He further stated that Jews of the region supported Bulgaria, and they would most probably work as Bulgarian spies in a possible war between Turkey and Bulgaria.²⁶⁶ The banality of Öngören's anti-Semitism is evident in his writing in which he defined the Thracian Jews as "immoral, sinister, importunate, duplicitous and avaricious."²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*, pp. 82-84.

²⁶⁴ For the emergence of Italian expansionism, see Payne, *A History of Fascism*, pp. 88-89.

²⁶⁵ İbrahim Talî Öngören (1875-1952) was a military physician, diplomat, politician and one of the most important bureaucrats of the early Republican era. His close friendship with Atatürk started in 1911 while they were both in Libya as young officers, to organize the resistance against the Italian occupation. Öngören remained in the most inner circle of friends of Atatürk until his death. In 1924 he was appointed as an ambassador in Warsaw. In 1926, he became a Parliament member but in 1927 he was promoted and appointed to one of the most powerful bureaucratic positions in the Republican Turkey and became an Inspector-General. From 1927 to 1933 he served as the Inspector-General of the First Region (Eastern and South-Eastern Anatolia) and from 1933 to 1935 he acted as the Inspector-General of the Second Region (Thrace). In 1936 he returned to the Grand Assembly and served as a parliament member from the Republican People's Party until his death in 1952.

²⁶⁶ His exact wording was; "I have the strongest belief that Jews all over the region are the instruments of the foreigners."

²⁶⁷ For the full text of the report, see Bali, *1934 Trakya Olayları*, pp. 387-410.

According to Aktar due to these military concerns and the perceived unreliability of the non-Muslims, the government wanted to remove a strategically important region from the “potential threat” of Jews by driving them to Istanbul, but their plan, which had to be undertaken with great care and finesse turned into a scandal due to the “inadequacy and the local notables eagerness” of the local party members who were impatient to take-over the riches of the fleeing Jews.²⁶⁸ Although it is debatable if the government directly orchestrated the events, their negative attitude towards non-Muslims and the perception of them as a potential ‘Fifth Column’ could have contributed to the events.

The unreliability attributed to the non-Muslims speaks volumes about the discriminatory nature of the assimilation policies of the Republican regime. Despite all of their efforts and willingness to be a part of the Turkish nation, non-Muslims were not accepted as equal nationals. Furthermore, in parallel with the intensification of the authoritarianism, the ethnicist attitude of the regime intensified as well, which led to the further discriminations against non-Muslims. During 1940s, the most crucial example of this discriminatory attitude is illustrated with the Wealth Tax²⁶⁹ which was levied not just on the non-Muslim minorities but the implementation of the tax as a punitive measure against non-Muslims led to the large quantity of properties of the non-Muslims being transferred to Muslim Turks.

During the Second World War, the government tried its best to deal with war profiteering and black marketers, but when the protectionist policies failed, they decided to relax the regulation of the markets which resulted in hyperinflation and led to certain actors in the society becoming extremely rich. These actors were mainly large landowners, and the importers, who were mostly non-Muslim.²⁷⁰ This newly gained wealth made the non-Muslims targets of the nationalist press and the Republican elite. On November 11, 1942, Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu²⁷¹ made a

²⁶⁸ Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*, pp. 86-88.

²⁶⁹ For more information on the Wealth Tax, see Rıdvan Akar, *Varlık Vergisi: Tek Parti Rejiminde Azınlık Karşısı Politika Örneği* (Istanbul: Belge, 1992) and Aşkale Yolcuları – *Varlık Vergisi ve Çalışma Kampları* (Istanbul: Doğan Kitap, 2009); Faik Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası* (Istanbul: Nebioğlu, 1951); Rıfat N. Bali, “Çok Partili Demokrasi Döneminde Varlık Vergisi Üzerine Tartışmalar.” *Tarih ve Toplum*, No. 165 (September 1997), pp. 175-187.; and Ayhan Aktar, *Varlık Vergisi ve "Türkleştirme" Politikaları* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2001).

²⁷⁰ Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, p. 34.

²⁷¹ Şükrü Saracoğlu (1886-1953) was one of the most prominent politicians of the Republican era. In addition of serving as a member of the parliament continuously from 1923 to 1950, he presided over almost every important office of the regime. Throughout his career, he served as the Prime Minister

fiery speech at the Grand Assembly, explained the devastating economic conditions of Turkey in detail, blamed the war profiteers and announced a special wealth tax to solve the economic problems of the country. In this speech, Saracoğlu did not target the minorities, in fact, he explained that that would be levied solely on the big businessmen, rich landlords, and large landowners.²⁷² However, in a closed session, he stated that the tax will specifically target “people who became rich by taking advantage of the hospitality shown” by Turkey.²⁷³ It was clear that he described the rich non-Muslims with these words which further proves that the non-Muslims of Turkey were perceived as guests who were tolerated by the real owners of the land; the Muslim Turks.

The Wealth Tax did not seem to be destructive in essence but the implementation of the tax was nothing short of chaotic and catastrophic. Local councils which were responsible of determining the tax rates worked arbitrarily. The system was corrupt and rampant with favouritism and nepotism; in most cases the councils protected the tax payers they personally knew and to compensate the difference some taxpayers were forced to pay even more.²⁷⁴ Mostly, the victims of this arbitrariness were the non-Muslims. For instance, among the taxpayers in Istanbul, 87 per cent of them were non-Muslims.²⁷⁵

The collection of the tax was problematic as well; the tax payers were not allowed to object the rates determined by the councils and appeal to the decisions. Furthermore, the law gave only 15 days to the taxpayers to pay this amount. If a taxpayer would not pay the tax, they had to pay the same amount with interest, and when they were still not able to pay their properties would be confiscated. If the worth of the confiscated property was not enough to pay the tax, the taxpayers would be sent to labour camps. The arbitrary nature of the law was evident in the implementation of

(1942-1946), Speaker of the Parliament (1948-1950), Foreign Minister (1938-1942), Minister of Justice (1933-1938), Minister of Finance (1927-1930) and Minister of Education (1924-1925).

²⁷² Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu’s speech at the Grand Assembly, November 11, 1942. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*, Devre VI, Cilt 28, pp. 14-25.

²⁷³ Akar, *Aşkale Yolcuları*, p. 96.

²⁷⁴ For a summary on the corruption during the implementation of the Wealth Tax, see Nevin Coşar, “Varlık Vergisi Konusundaki Yolsuzluk Söylentileri.” *Ankara Üniversitesi Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi Dergisi*, Vol. 58:2 (2003), pp. 1-27.

²⁷⁵ Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*, p. 139. According to Coşar these tax-payers paid 70 per cent of the total tax revenue in Istanbul. See Coşar, p. 13.

these rules, as well. Among the 2057 taxpayers who were sent to the camps, 1400 of them were non-Muslims.²⁷⁶

The nature of this law is widely debated. While some scholars such as Coşar claimed that the tax was a necessity and a simple product of the economic situation of the era, others such as Bali, Akar and Aktar emphasized the ethnicist attitude in the implementation of the law. While Coşar rightfully claims that the extra taxes which were sanctioned on the non-Muslims were not determined as a central state policy, but they were determined by the local councils. For instance, in Istanbul, it was Faik Ökte, the head of provincial treasury implemented a system specifically to tax the non-Muslim much more heavily than the rest of the tax-payers.²⁷⁷ Coşar further comments that it was only natural for the non-Muslims to pay more, because the wealth was already gathered in their hands before the implementation of the law. On the other hand, Aktar defines the Wealth Tax as a continuation of the economic policies of the CUP. He claims that the government was aiming for the Turkification of the economic sphere, and to achieve this aim, they implemented this tax as a punitive measure. In the long term, this assumption seems to be correct; because the means of production and properties of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie were bought by the burgeoning Anatolian businessmen at bargain prices and the place of the non-Muslims entrepreneurs were taken over by the Muslims which led to a social transformation.²⁷⁸ In the economic sphere, Coşar claims that the tax was a successful endeavour²⁷⁹ while Aktar claims in long term there were no significant improvements in Turkish economy due to the Wealth Tax. Furthermore, with the demise of the non-Muslim bourgeoisie, entrepreneurship and the practices and trade traditions associated with them were gone until the development of the Turkish bourgeoisie and this vacuum created dormancy in Turkish private sector. Regardless of the intentions of the government, the Wealth Tax was perceived as a catastrophe by the non-Muslims of Turkey, and made their assimilation into Turkishness extremely difficult. The implementation of the tax

²⁷⁶ Ökte, *Varlık Vergisi Faciası*, p. 158.

²⁷⁷ Ibid., p. 10. Ökte accepts that he divided the tax-payers in four distinct categories; Muslims, Non-Muslims, Foreigners and *Dönme*s; a Muslim group who were descended from the followers of kabbalist Sabbatai Zvi who claimed to be the long-awaited Jewish Messiah in the 17th century. Among these groups non-Muslim taxpayers were forced to pay 5 to 10 times more than the others.

²⁷⁸ According to Bali, the disastrous results of the Wealth Tax was one of the main reasons of the mass relocation of the Jews of Turkey to Israel after 1948. For more information, see Rıfat N. Bali, *Aliya: Bir Toplu Göçün Öyküsü (1946-1949)* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2003).

²⁷⁹ In 1942, due to the implementation of the Wealth Tax, the total tax revenue was increased 54 per cent which financially relieved the government. See Coşar, p. 13.

further showed that the actions of the Republican elite towards non-Muslims can be regarded as exclusionist.

On the other hand, at least in principle, Republican policies towards non-Muslim minorities are perceived as inclusionary by most scholars. For instance according to Yeğen, Kurds, the largest ethnic minority in Turkey were “allowed to experience citizenship rights without discrimination provided that they assimilated into Turkishness.”²⁸⁰ Yet, despite many common characteristics between Kurds and Turks, the path of the Kurds to assimilation was just as tricky as the non-Muslims. First barrier was language, while the second one was the different lifestyle. Right from the start, Republican nationalists perceived the Kurdish problem not as a national issue but as an issue of modernization. The Kurdish identity was perceived by the Republican ruling elite as a non-modern, archaic, backward identity because politically; they were organized as tribes, and socially; they were seen as ignorant. Furthermore, the Republican governments blamed them for refraining from performing military service and paying their taxes.²⁸¹ The image of Kurd was also a naïve one; because according to the Republican view they were exploited by their tribal leaders and the leaders of the local Sufi religious orders. Therefore, the identity was a problematic one because it was developed at the intersection of various autonomous zones; such as linguistic, religious and social, without the intervention of the government. Republican nationalism tried to disturb each of these autonomous zones. The Sufi religious orders were abolished in 1925, through the education system Turkish started to penetrate into Kurdistan and the tribal system was tried to be dismantled by the regime, especially after the Settlement Law of 1934.²⁸² These were the soft assimilation measures taken by the Republic. An example of these policies was the Plan on the Rehabilitation of the Eastern Provinces (*Şark Islahat Planı*), which was adopted in 1925 after the Sheikh Said revolts. With this plan the traditional social and cultural structures in eastern Turkey were targeted by the regime.

The assimilationist features of the plan can be summarized as follows: the participants of the past revolts would be forced into exile in Western Turkey (Articles 5, 9 and 15), military outposts would be constructed with the money which would be

²⁸⁰ Mesut Yeğen, “Turkish Nationalism and the Kurdish Question.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, Vol. 30:1 (2007), pp. 119-151.

²⁸¹ Ibid., p. 123.

²⁸² Settlement Law is examined in detail in Chapter 4.

collected from the region (Article 17), the appointment of Kurds to any public office posts in the region would be prohibited (Article 10), the appointment of native judges to the eastern provinces would be prohibited (Article 3), the sale and lease of the former lands of Armenians to Kurds would be prohibited (Article 5), non-Kurds from the Black Sea region, and 500,000 immigrants from the Balkans and Caucasus would be settled on the lands “left behind by the Armenians” (Article 5), boarding schools and schools for girls would be constructed to change the Kurdish cultural identity (Article 14), education and publication in non-Turkish would be forbidden, personal names and place names in the region would be changed into Turkish, Kurdish language spoken in the private sphere would be prohibited on the west bank of Euphrates (Article 16) and speaking Kurdish in the public sphere would be restricted (Article 13).²⁸³ Even though it is unknown to what extent these suggestions were implemented, it is clear that this plan was designed to replace the local Kurdish identity with the modern Turkish identity.

Similarly, according to the Circular on Turkification of 1930, people from small villages who communicated in “foreign languages” would be scattered in nearby Turkish towns (Article 3). Especially women would be encouraged to speak Turkish through placing them in Turkish towns and Turkish women would be encouraged by the government to marry non-Turkish speakers for the Turkification of their families. The aim of this programme was the “Turkification of their languages, customs and ideals, binding them to Turkish history and destiny.”²⁸⁴ These policies do show that the Republic had a diverse selection of assimilation policies used when dealing with Kurds, ranging from forced relocation to educational reforms. Assimilation policy aimed to end the perceived “backwardness” of the Kurdish communities. Along with the modernity-backwardness dichotomy, the concern for security constituted the remaining significant part of the state policy regarding the situation in the East. Therefore along with these soft measures, brutal force was occasionally used when any occurrence of an unrest in the region. The Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925 and the Ararat Rebellion of 1930²⁸⁵ were dealt with the use of disproportionate force.

²⁸³ Mesut Yeğen, “*Müstakbel-Türk’ten Sözde Vatandaş – Cumhuriyet ve Kürtler*.” Presentation given in Istanbul, 2009.

²⁸⁴ Baskın Oran, “1937-38’de Ne Oldu?” Presentation given in Berlin, November 2010.

²⁸⁵ Ararat Revolts were led by Xoybun, one of the first modern Kurdish organizations that aimed for national independence, whose members went to Mount Ararat, which has become a safe-haven for the Kurdish dissidents after the Sheikh Said Revolt. After each clash with the Turkish forces, the rebels

According to Yıldız, these vulgar displays of power resulted in the deepening of the gap between the state and the Kurds.²⁸⁶ Regardless of the methods used, the Republican regime failed to assimilate the Kurds. Especially after 1980s, Kurdish national consciousness in Turkey is constantly getting stronger.

As the examples above show, although Republican nationalism started its life as a form of civic nationalism during the 1930s it was transformed into a nationalism which made more and more reference to Turkish ethnicity. More importantly Republican nationalism envisaged an undivided, monolithic, modern nationhood and to achieve this it used a combination of exclusionary and inclusionary policies. For some minorities, including the non-Muslim minorities, there were impassable boundaries between them and Turkishness therefore their assimilation process was a rather difficult one. On the other hand for Muslim minorities, for instance for Kurds, their ethnic and linguistic differences were not recognized at all. Instead their conditions were seen as a form of backwardness which was dealt with a mixture of soft and hard policies. Kurds were forced to accept the newly-formed Turkish identity through joining to the common culture and language, and when they resist to any policies of the centre; they were dealt with force.

An Evaluation of Turkish Nationalism

It should be noted that the Turkification process of the Republican regime was not a unique experience, in fact, it closely resembles the nation-building processes of many nation-states which emerged in the long 19th century and post-war era out of the crumbling multi-national, cosmopolitan empires. In these periods, new, modern nations were started to be formed as part of state policies. On the contrary to the primordialist theses about nationhood, the nation-building processes did not predate the nation-states. Instead, they followed the political ambitions of the states which is perfectly encapsulated by Piedmontese politician Massimo d'Azeglio's famous remark on how the task of "making Italians" had still to be accomplished after the

were fleeing to Little Ararat of Iran; therefore it was quite a task to quash the revolt. The Turkish government made an agreement with Iran and annexed Little Ararat in 1930 to quell the rebellion. According the Baskın Oran, with the Ararat Revolts, traditional Kurdish rebellions came to an end and modern-nationalist rebellions began. See Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası*, p. 248.

²⁸⁶ Yıldız, "Kemalist Milliyetçilik," p. 229.

unification of Italy. The Turkification process had a similar aim; Turkey was established after the nationalist struggle, but a Turkish nation in the modern sense did not exist. The legacy of the Ottoman *millet* system still lingered on in the early Republican era. Ottoman regime never organized its subjects according to their ethnicity; religion has always been the main identity of an Ottoman. The Republican regime tried to transform the Muslim population in Anatolia and build a monolithic, modern national body out of these people who previously felt a connection to their state, religion, denomination or localities; but not to their “nation”.

Turkification policies targeted ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic groups who did not fit to the modern, secular national entity envisaged by the Republican elite. From the linguistic perspective, the Republicans were luckier than their European counterparts. Hobsbawm states that only the half of the population of France properly spoke French in 1789. Similarly, in post-Risorgimento Italy, less than three percent of the “Italians” used Italian as the language for everyday conversation.²⁸⁷ Duggan adds that during the Hungarian Revolution of 1848, the members of the Hungarian Parliament had to address the assembly in Latin to be understood by most of the members.²⁸⁸ On the other hand, in Turkey, Ottoman Turkish had been the language of the administration for a very long time but as the aforementioned examples on the Republican language policies such as the prohibition of the use of Kurdish on the west bank of Euphrates or the “Citizen, Speak Turkish!” campaigns show us that assimilationist policies attacking the linguistic groups were still seen necessary for the Republican regime to swiftly establish a common national identity. Although these policies were in harmony with the zeitgeist of the post-war environment in Europe, the methods used by the Republican elite brought Turkey close to the Fascist camp. In this part of the chapter these policies will be evaluated in the light of the previously mentioned ‘fascist minimum’.

To evaluate the legacy of Turkish nationalism with the lens of Fascism, we must once again remember the fascist minimum. A fascist regime must have three different components: a revolutionary approach, ultra-nationalism which is based on the elimination of the internal and external threats and the notion of *palingenesis* which

²⁸⁷ Eric Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge: CU Press, 1990), p. 60.

²⁸⁸ Christopher Duggan, *The Force of Destiny: A History of Italy* (London: Penguin, 2007), pp. 108-109.

means the revival of the nation. Among these components revolutionary approach separates fascist regimes from traditional right-wing monarchies or conservative regimes such as Zog's Albania, Metaxas' Greece, Salazar's Portugal and Franco's Spain. All of these regimes aimed the preservation of traditional sources of authorities in their respective countries, while fascist regimes tried to radically challenge these sources. As mentioned in the previous chapters of this study, Republican regime was revolutionary. Instead of using traditional sources of authority in the country as a source of legitimacy, Republican attacked these sources, abolished the Sultanate, the Caliphate and Sufi religious orders. Therefore the Republican ideology was based on the total rejection of the traditions and it fits well with the fascist revolutionary model.

Palingenesis, the second component of the definition refers to the sense of a new start or regeneration after a phase of crisis or decline. Using this term, Griffin draws attention to the sense of messianic or fanatical mission embodied within fascism which supported the prospect of "national regeneration, the rebirth of the national pride, and the promise of national greatness."²⁸⁹ The last component of the definition, 'ultra-nationalism' which means the establishment of an intense and militant sense of national identity. This is a militant, and extreme type of nationalism which rejected basic values of humanism, and employed eliminationism in the domestic sphere to cleanse the nation from unwanted 'others',²⁹⁰ and utilized expansionism in the international sphere to fulfil the destiny of the nation.²⁹¹

Upon inspecting the legacy of the Turkish single-party rule, it is evident that determining if the Republican regime was fascist or not, is an extremely difficult task; yet it provides us with a great opportunity to evaluate the Turkish single-party experience within the *zeitgeist* of its time. Republican single-party regime was definitely nationalist; in fact the nationalism employed by the regime was aggressive against the linguistic, ethnic and religious minorities in the country and it was aimed to eliminate them through melting their specific identities within the newly established, modern, secular, national identity. Although not being racist or genocidal, their assimilationist policies were still destructive.

²⁸⁹ Heywood, *Political Ideologies*, p. 223.

²⁹⁰ Aristotle Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism: The Eliminationist Drive in Fascist Europe* (London: Routledge, 2009), pp. 5-7.

²⁹¹ For the relation between fascism and expansionism, see Aristotle Kallis, *Fascist Ideology – Territory and Expansionism in Italy and Germany, 1922-1945* (London: Routledge, 2000).

The assimilationist policies of the regime was a mixture of inclusionary and exclusionary measures. Even the regime presented itself as an overtly secular one, and claimed that all of the residents of the country were organic Turks, in practice the policies targeting the non-Muslim minorities were exclusionary. In regards of the religious minorities, every single action of the regime such as the intimidation and harassment they suffered during the “Citizen Speak, Turkish!” campaigns to the Wealth Tax, were discriminatory. Assimilationist policies are, of course, not unique to Turkey, they were used in nearly every nation-state that emerged after the First World War but the implementation of this process tend to differ from each other. On one hand there were practices of inclusion which can be described as tolerant integration and aimed for the long term assimilation.²⁹² Education policies that target initially the establishment of manageable ethnic and linguistic identities within an overarching supra-identity cleanly defined by the state and eventually, the melting of these identities within that supra-identity to achieve a monolithic society with very minor differences between its members is the most basic example of these ‘long term’ policies. On the contrary to this method, the other method of assimilation was elimination of every source of diversity in the society through exclusion, intolerance and short term measures; such as mass killings or deportation. Fascism generally implemented this second form, because Fascists were convinced that they were living in a watershed moment in history with a special, almost spiritual task at hand,²⁹³ and to achieve to their goals as fast as possible, time was precious. The Republican practices oscillated between these two forms of eliminations.

Practices such as the education policies which used Turkish as the sole medium of instruction, the forced relocation of Kurdish tribe members in the Western parts of Turkey to dissolve their ethnic identities within the dominant Turkish identity of those regions were some of the plans that targeted long term assimilation. These practices did differ immensely from the extreme short term measures which can be seen in the Fascist extermination policies of the era. A plan such as the encouragement of Turkish women to marry non-Turkish speakers for the Turkification of their future families which was a part of the Circular on Turkification of 1930 would be inconceivable and unimaginable for the Fascist regimes of inter-war era. Still, we must consider that a

²⁹² Kallis, *Genocide and Fascism*, p. 36.

²⁹³ Roger Griffin, *A Fascist Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 16.

rather large portion of the Republican policies were exclusionary and aimed to eliminate diversity in short term. The fate of the non-Muslim minorities is a good example of this approach. Initial legal statutes concerning the non-Muslims targeted to isolate them. Regulations such as Act concerning Civil Servants (1926) which blocked non-Muslims from civil service, the Law on Arts and Employments allotted to Turkish Citizens (1932) which made some lines of work forbidden to the members of the Greek community of Istanbul and the regulations announced in July 1938 which prevented non-Muslims from becoming military officers restricted non-Muslims for specific roles in the society. Although later events such as Thrace Incidents of 1934, and the Wealth Tax of 1942 that physically and economically targeted non-Muslims were not entirely orchestrated by the regime, they were in accordance with the Republican perception of the non-Muslim minorities. For the Republican mind-set they were either agents of 'foreign interests' or mere 'guests' in Turkey. Due to the traumatic events in the Republican era the non-Muslim population reduced gradually and immigration became a viable option for the minorities. Eventually, these destructive and discriminatory politics were successful; while in 1927, 2.5 per cent of the population was non-Muslim, in modern Turkey this number dropped to 2 per thousand excluding the Alevis and non-religious.²⁹⁴

For the Muslim minorities the experience of Turkification depended to their background. For the millions of migrants arrived in Turkey from the Balkans, and Caucasus during the late 19th and 20th centuries, the experience was more positive. For them the assimilation process was quite straightforward, they had to give up their native language in exchange for being 'proper' Turkish nationals. This assimilation process was most problematic for Kurds due to several reasons. First, the Kurds were a much larger community. Secondly, in some provinces they were in majority. Lastly, the regime did not do enough to disturb the local, tribal, and linguistic ties among them by implementing serious social reforms. Due to these reasons, dissolving their identity among the new, national identity was an extremely difficult task. More problems followed when the regime decided to apply short term measures, and acted with brute force. In these cases the gap between the state and the Kurds became even wider.²⁹⁵ In summary, in the domestic sphere the Republican nationalism targeted the

²⁹⁴ Oran estimates the number of non-Muslim minorities around 150,000. See Baskın Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar* (Istanbul: TESEV, 2004).

²⁹⁵ Yıldız, p. 232.

elimination of 'others' through Turkification, which can be described as an ultra-nationalist approach.

On the other hand, the foreign policy of the Republican regime was fundamentally different than the domestic nationalist policies of the regime and the foreign policies of the Fascist regimes. According to most scholars such as Kallis and Paxton, Fascism goes hand in hand with expansionism. Kallis states that the 'ideal community' envisaged by Fascists usually covered areas which were left out of the boundaries of the Fascist states.²⁹⁶ On the contrary to the aggressive expansion plans of Fascist states, such as Mussolini's dreams of controlling the Mediterranean or Hitler's plans about the "Lebensraum" in the East which should be used as a colony for German settlers,²⁹⁷ Republican foreign policy was based on the peaceful co-existence of countries. Instead of expansion, the Republican policy relied on the contraction of the land and held that through the contraction of the land Turkey would be stronger. In the international sphere, essential notions for the Republican regime were the territorial integrity and the independence of the country. In this era, even the two instances of acquisition of land in Montreux and Sanjak did not conflict with this approach because in these cases the regime followed the international law to establish peaceful arrangements while for the Fascist regimes of the inter-war era, international law was perceived as a corrupt concept which was not a thing to be taken serious of. The reasons of this difference was ideological. According to Sternhell, the Fascist ideology was based the "total rejection of the bourgeois civilization with its political and social structures and moral values."²⁹⁸ One of these values was rationalism which was discarded from the Fascist foreign policies but remained as an integral part of the Republican diplomacy. Instead of rejecting the world established on the values of Enlightenment, the Republican regime was fanatically devoted to the project of being a part of that world.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁶ Paxton, *The Anatomy of Fascism*, p. 186. Not all scholars agree with Kallis and Paxton on this issue. For Payne, while most Fascist polities were indeed imperialist, "several fascist movements had little interest in or even rejected new imperial ambitions." Payne also suggests that fascist movements "which appeared in satisfied national or imperialist states were generally defensive rather than aggressive." See Payne, *A History of Fascism*, p. 11.

²⁹⁷ Kershaw, *Hitler*, pp. 145-153.

²⁹⁸ Zeev Sternhell, "Fascist Ideology." Roger Griffin & Matthew Feldman (Eds.), *The Nature of Fascism* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 103.

²⁹⁹ According to Ahmad, the Republican regime "never rejected liberal principles or the idea of progress. It continued to recognise the rule of law and the importance of the constitutional state. It never

As for the concept of '*palingenesis*'; the other central concept of Fascism which is described by Griffin as the "total transformation of the political, moral and aesthetic culture of the nation to produce a new type of national community",³⁰⁰ Republican nationalism was clearly *palingenetic*. The single-party regime was aimed for the total transformation of the society and the establishment of a new nation, and the methods it used were definitely revolutionary since it did not build any coalitions with the historical sources of power in Turkey. It closed down the centuries old Sufi religious orders, abolished the caliphate and the sultanate, and melted every single important social organization within the ruling party. Among the traditional sources of power only large landowners and the military remained parts of the Republican ruling mechanism but the ruling elite did not share much power with them; especially in the ideological sphere. The project of totally transforming the society that they envisaged was controlled by them without any interference from any other part of the society. Therefore it is safe to assume that Republican regime aimed for regeneration and rebirth and utilized every apparatus of the state to perform the necessary reforms. In the single-party ideology the decline and degeneration of the nation were not associated with a certain minority group (such as the case in Nazi Germany) or an external force (such as the case in Fascist Italy), instead they were associated with the multi-cultural Ottoman past, and the perceived backwardness emanated from the Islamicate culture. All actions of the Republican regime were performed to purge the remnants of this past from the monolithic, 'healthy' nation-state that they were aiming to build.³⁰¹ Eliminating the 'other' from every single sphere whether social, political and cultural was seen necessary for the Republicans to achieve to modern, ideal society they envisaged. The methods they used to achieve this new society that they wanted to establish oscillated from generic Fascism to authoritarian modernism. Therefore the Republican regime can be described as a modernist, authoritarian regime with Fascist tendencies.

denied the universality of civilisation (as did the fascists) or rejected rationalism, individualism, and the fundamental equality of man and ethnic groups." See Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 65.

³⁰⁰ Griffin, *A Fascist Century*, p. 50.

³⁰¹ For many scholars the establishment of such a society is one of the ultimate aims of Fascism. Eatwell defines these imagined perfect societies as "new nations" while Gentile describes them as "homogenous organic communities". See Roger Eatwell, "Introduction: New Styles of Dictatorship and Leadership in Interwar Europe." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 7:2 (2006), pp. 127-37; and Gentile, "Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion.", pp. 329.

It should be noted that there were also numerous differences between Fascist regimes and single-party Turkey; such as Turkey's acceptance of the values of a universal, Western civilization and the regime's refusal to conduct an expansionist policy. This refusal was an important issue because it had internal repercussions. Since Republican single-party regime's foreign policy did not have an expansionist agenda, Republican leadership did not seek to promote militarism in Turkey, unlike most Fascist systems. The regime in Turkey was neither militant, nor militaristic. It did not have any paramilitary organizations and it did not promote war.³⁰² Similarly, it did not seek to mobilise the masses through a mass political party and RPP remained as a 'vanguard party' which tried to generate change in the society by a series of reforms.³⁰³ For some historians, these examples show that the Republican regime never truly embraced the entire Fascist methodology, but until the democratization process which started with the end of the war, the regime did not shy away from shaping the society according to its ideology in an authoritarian manner which did not give any room for political, social, religious and cultural plurality. Regardless of the lack of expansionist ideals, militarism and a search to recover former glories, the regime was authoritarian and it aimed to create a new, ideal national community through cleansing it from unwanted elements by assimilation or exclusion. The next chapter looks to this cleansing process through the lense of political religions.

³⁰² Oran, *Atatürk Milliyetçiliği*, pp. 41-50.

³⁰³ Plaggenborg, p. 124.

Chapter 3

Turkish Authoritarianism as a Political Religion

Like Prometheus, didn't he (Atatürk), steal the fire from the hands of Zeus, didn't he try to create "the new human" from the heat of a stalk? Didn't he suffer the same end; the wrath of the one who never changes and loathes progress? And, even now, aren't birds of prey continuously eating his liver, too?³⁰⁴

- Yakup Kadri on Atatürk, 1953

In the morning of the cold day of November 10, 1938, Atatürk, the president of the young Turkish Republic for the last fifteen years, passed away at the Dolmabahçe Palace, Istanbul. He had been battling cirrhosis for months, and people close to him were expecting the worst but the citizens, most of whom remained devoted to him from the early days of his ascension to the leadership of the nationalist movement in Anatolia in 1919, through the establishment of the Republican People's Party and to the very last days of his four-term presidency, were still shocked when they saw the flags at the Palace flying at half-mast as a symbol of national mourning. The news reports at noon proved their worst fears right. Their leader, their 'saviour',³⁰⁵ was dead.

The level of shock was immense. The demise of Atatürk was a devastating psychological blow which shattered the dreams and the confidence of the people. Tarık Zafer Tunaya, who was then a student at Istanbul University remembered years later that when he saw the flag at the gate of the university flying at half-mast he thought that "while Atatürk was alive everything seemed possible for the future of our country, now at the time of his death, suddenly, everything seemed to be out of reach." Similarly, Mina Urgan, another student of the same university described that moment

³⁰⁴ Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Panaroma* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2010 [1953]), p. 277.

³⁰⁵ "Halâskâr", which means the 'saviour' in Ottoman Turkish was one of the honorary titles given to Mustafa Kemal.

by stating that the entire nation felt “like a woman whose lover has just passed away”.³⁰⁶

Life in Istanbul seemed to stand still. All cinemas and theatres in the city closed for the day. Concerts, stage plays, and social gatherings were cancelled.³⁰⁷ Istanbul Football League games were cancelled and postponed for three weeks. While the government was preparing for a state funeral, thousands of people – especially young people and students – gathered all around the country and staged impromptu remembrance ceremonies to pay their respects to the late president. Kinross’s depictions of “women crying in the streets, praying in front of the pictures of Atatürk which were covered in black veils” show the sincerity of the trauma suffered by the people of Turkey.³⁰⁸ Yet, they were forbidden to express their sadness in traditional ways. The government prohibited the people from staging Islamic remembrance ceremonies.

One of the most common of these ceremonies was *Mevlid*, an Islamically-based but entirely Turkish tradition, in which a *masnavi*³⁰⁹ called *Vesiletu’n-necat* (Means of Salvation) which was written by Süleyman Çelebi at the beginning of the 15th century to praise the birth and miracles of the Islamic prophet Mohammed is recited to the congregations at the mosques to remember and honour the recently died. According to Asım Us’s memoirs,³¹⁰ this type of remembrance was banned right after Atatürk’s death started to be seen as imminent by the government.³¹¹ Similarly, *Cenâze Namazı*, the Islamic funeral prayer of Atatürk was not held in public and was only attended by his family and close friends. One can assume that the government was afraid of the possible chaos and disorder that might occur in these rituals, yet they did not stop the secular ceremonies. In another impromptu gathering, thousands of students in Istanbul got together in front of the Dolmabahçe Palace two days after Atatürk’s death. *Ulus*, the official newspaper of the regime, reported this event with a highly peculiar choice of words, especially for an evidently secular country. The

³⁰⁶ Mina Urgan, *Bir Dinozorun Anıları* (Istanbul: YKY, 2000), p. 166.

³⁰⁷ *Akşam*, November 11, 1938.

³⁰⁸ Kinross, *Atatürk*, p. 574.

³⁰⁹ A form of poetry which is written in rhyming couplets.

³¹⁰ Mehmet Asım Us (1884-1967) was a journalist, educator, and bureaucrat who also acted as the editor-in-chief and owner of the newspaper *Vakit*. Us served as a Parliament member from the Republican People’s Party continuously from 1927 to 1950.

³¹¹ Asım Us, *Hatıra Notları* (Istanbul: Vakit, 1966), p. 310.

headlines of the day read: “Thousands made the *tawaf* around the Palace”.³¹² *Tawaf* is an ancient rite which is known to have existed among many religious cults of the world. It played a very important role in Arabic polytheism and it was later incorporated in Islam as a part of the pilgrimage. In Islamic context, it means the collective circumambulation around the *Kabaa*, the holiest shrine of Islam which is located in Mecca. *Ulus* was not alone in associating the death-place of Atatürk with the *Kabaa*. Alaettin Gövsa,³¹³ an educator, poet and Member of Parliament, composed a poem with similar themes which was named “*Atamızın Tawaf*” (Circumambulation of Our Father) right after Atatürk’s death. In this poem Gövsa imagined that following the passing of Atatürk he was circling the Dolmabahçe Palace which was depicted as a holy, ethereal realm and witnessing that every object related to Atatürk; the building itself, the soldiers guarding the premises and even the elements of nature were mournful due to the passing of the late President. Gövsa wrote:

Old memories in my heart, I circumambulated,

Since the sun³¹⁴ does not rise anymore, everywhere was dark.³¹⁵

Symbolizing Atatürk and the regime established by him with the light, the sun, the stars and other sources of illumination and creating a dichotomy between him, his ideas and deeds and the people and ideologies which positioned themselves against Atatürk by representing them with the darkness was quite popular in early Republican literature. This tendency can also be observed in visual arts. Many monuments dedicated to Atatürk in this era were decorated with reliefs depicting several sources of light, such as the rising sun to reinforce this association.³¹⁶ In accordance with this artistic trend, the rest of Gövsa’s poem was filled with similar imagery which glorified Atatürk as a source of light:

³¹² *Ulus*, November 13, 1938.

³¹³ İbrahim Alaettin Gövsa (1889-1949) was a poet, author, educator and encyclopaedia editor who continuously served as a parliament member between 1927 and 1946 from RPP except for a brief period of 1935-1936 when he took the office of the Inspectorship at the Ministry of Education.

³¹⁴ Here, the sun is used as a metaphor for Atatürk.

³¹⁵ “*Gönlümde eski hatıralar, eyledim tavaf, artık o doğmuyor diye muzlimdi her taraf.*”

³¹⁶ One of earliest examples of the numerous Atatürk monuments in the capital city Ankara; the equestrian Atatürk monument in front of the Ethnography Museum of Ankara which was constructed in November 1927 has reliefs covering the sides of the pedestal of the monument. One of them depicts a scene of the sun rising over Ankara. The Victory Monument of Ankara, which was completed later in the same month, also contains the image of the rising sun. See Kıvanç Osma, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Anıt Heykelleri (1923-1946)* (Ankara: AAM, 2003), pp. 36-45.

*He was a torch, his cheerfulness brought light to every gathering,
His magnificent personality filled up the state,
His looks were beautiful, his soul was of a giant,
He was a lightning bolt, in essence, a flame he was.*

With these similes, *Ulus* and Gövsa were not just making an exaggeration. The language employed by the regime regarding Atatürk's death including the dramatic metaphors which associated his death-place with the *Kaaba* was quite deliberate. Like many other significant moments of his life – such as May 19th, his arrival in Anatolia during the nationalist struggle– a day which was began to be celebrated as “Atatürk Day” in 1935 and was later incorporated into a full-fledged national holiday – his death was used to add a brick to the establishment of the new political religion of Turkey. Like his battles, victories and achievements, his death was also sacralised.

The official remembrance ceremony was carefully structured by the regime according to the new Republican imagery and icons. Atatürk's catafalque was surrounded by six torches which were placed on tall white columns, resembling the *Altı Ok* (Six Arrows), the six main principles of the party.³¹⁷ The emblem of the party was also six white arrows which are placed on a red background. The number six was a recurring theme in the ceremony, they were six guards watching over the catafalque.³¹⁸ Black, the usual colour which is associated with death and mourning was replaced by red; the colour of the Republic and the party. Even his funeral challenged the traditions, and while it was secular in shape and form, it produced a deeply spiritual frenzy among the masses. In the official funeral ceremony, which was attended by hundreds of thousands, a stampede killed eleven mourners.³¹⁹

Yet the regime downplayed this incident, and constantly stated that life was going on, and the ruling party, the state and the regime would live on despite the death of the leader. They had to work even harder now, because Atatürk, as a source of natural charisma, was the cement that kept the Republic together. His successor, İsmet İnönü (1884-1973), who did not possess the charisma of Atatürk was proclaimed as the *Milli Şef* (National Chief), and took over the wide-ranging responsibilities of

³¹⁷ The Six Arrows were: Republicanism, Populism, Secularism, Reformism, Nationalism and Statism.

³¹⁸ *Ulus*, November 16, 1938.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Atatürk. In a speech given by Prime Minister Şükrü Saracoğlu in 1943, İnönü was defined not as a usual leader but as “the mind and the soul of the nation”.³²⁰ In accordance with this description, the Republican regime carefully established an elaborate personality cult around İnönü mainly by associating him with the late founder of the Republic.

The Republican political religion continued to use the cult of Atatürk even after his death to manufacture legitimacy for the regime. Throughout İnönü’s leadership, the regime would try its best to mirror Atatürk’s charisma on İnönü. Atatürk, who was already declared the “Eternal Leader” of the party at the Second Party Congress in 1927, was acknowledged as the “Eternal Chief” of Turkey after his death. This made him the *de facto* ruler of the country even after his death, which created a strange hierarchy where the deceased seem to have more authority than the living. This system in which the actions of the living were constantly measured against the deeds and thoughts of Atatürk is quite similar to a “necrocracy”, a term coined by Christopher Hitchens to describe the political system in North Korea where Kim Il-Sung is still the official the head of state despite being dead since 1994.³²¹

The previous chapters of this study depicted the authoritarian and fascist tendencies of the Republican regime whose twin objectives were modernization and the creation of an ideal, national community. This study argues that to successfully reach to these goals, and to solidify and sustain the regime, the regime encircled the community using a plethora of ideological weapons, including the education system and the political party. During this process the most powerful ideological weapon in the Republican armoury was the Republican political religion which helped the regime to reach to the point of forming an ideological singularity in Turkey. This chapter of the study deals with the establishment of this political religion which was based on the personal cults of Presidents Atatürk and İnönü. The chapter will specifically focus on the reproduction and dissemination of the values of this political religion through the agency of public art, education, media and mass meetings, and the sacralisation of the secular entities, such as the leaders, the ruling party and the flag, to initially compete against and eventually replace the existing ideologies, beliefs and forms of belonging

³²⁰ Şükrü Saracoğlu, Speech at Grand Party Congress, June 15, 1943. BCA: 30...1.0.0/ 42.249...1.

³²¹ Christopher Hitchens, *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2007), p. 85.

in post-Ottoman Turkey. Since every political religion is designed as simple dichotomies³²² – an almost pseudo-religious, celestial fight between the “positive force” represented by the regime and “decadent” powers – this chapter will also try to identify Turkish authoritarianism’s enemies which are crucial to understand the essential characteristics and tenets of the Republican ideology.

Theoretical Framework: Political Religions and their Relation with Turkish Authoritarianism

Political religions are political systems which strongly resemble the structure, power, intrusiveness, and pervasiveness of organized religions. Similar to the traditional religions, political religions have sacred codes and liturgies. The term was coined first by German philosopher Eric Voegelin in 1930s, during the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe. Voegelin who witnessed the emergence of the Nazi regime in Germany, blamed the increasing influence of secularism, modernization, glorification of science and the decreasing belief in traditional religions for the rise of totalitarianism. According to Voegelin, in this spiritual crisis people started to look for spiritual meanings in inner-worldly political systems and in this process “the contents of the world became gods”.³²³ In summary, Voegelin’s approach was a deeply religious criticism of the powerful secular entities which were slowly taking the place of the religious ones in inter-war era Europe.

A similar concern on the “religious” nature of the authoritarian regimes of the inter-war era can be found in the works of Maritain. Maritain’s criticism have its roots in the Durkheimian dichotomy of ‘sacred and profane’.³²⁴ For Maritain, human beings have material and spiritual dimensions, and after the rise of secularism, World War I and the global economic crisis, liberal political systems lost the ability to reflect this spirituality. Maritain claims that only a political order which recognizes the

³²² Eusebio Mujal Leon and Eric Langenbacher, “Is Castroism a Political Religion?” Griffin, Mallet & Tortorice (Eds.) *The Sacred in Twentieth-Century Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 56.

³²³ Eric Voegelin, *Die Politische Religionen* (Vienna: Bermann-Fischen Verlag, 1938), pp. 51-60.

³²⁴ According to Durkheim, for the traditional religions, the world is divided in two domains; one holy realm containing all that is sacred and another inner-worldly realm of profanity. For many social scientists, the once clear line between the two realms, started to get blurry with the destructing effects of modernism and secularism, and the profane realm invaded the sacred one with the emergence of political religions. For Durkheim’s concept, see Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Free Press, 1995 [1912]).

sovereignty of God is suitable for the spiritual needs of the people and states that in the spiritual vacuum of the inter-war era, new, Messianic regimes such as communism and fascism which promised both inner-worldly and spiritual salvation emerged. These regimes transformed secular entities such as the party and the state into religious entities, or in Maritain's words; "turned idols into Gods". Maritain defines these regimes as "secular religions" or "earthly religions" which had inner-worldly ends but still inspired "a sense of sacredness, of faith, of dedication, of fanaticism, intransigence and intolerance" as were the traditional religions.³²⁵ Similarly, Luigi Storz, a contemporary of Voegelin and Maritain described the system in Nazi Germany as a "pagan state religion" and stated that leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini were "elevated to the rank of prophet and saviour". It should be noted that most of these critics came from religious and conservative backgrounds. They perceived religions as positive forces in humanity's journey while political religions were seen as usurpers, occupying the rightful place of the divine.

The theories of these conservative authors were later criticized or expanded by liberal social scientists. Hannah Arendt, one of the foremost experts on totalitarianism, refused Voegelin's assumptions from a secular perspective. In 1950s, Arendt stated that blaming the rise of the authoritarian regimes on a religious crisis was questionable and secondly, assuming that the free, democratic societies were the achievements of religion was problematic. Furthermore, Arendt warned that the perception of religion as a remedy of totalitarianism may lead to the transformation of religions into ideologies, which could have equally devastating effects.³²⁶ In light of these criticisms, starting from 1960s, a more secular wave of scholarship started to develop on the concept of political religions. Among these scholars, Raymond Aron who used the concept of 'secular religion' as a synonym for totalitarianism³²⁷ did not perceive secularism in a negative light. In fact, he was critical of religions, and for him a political system taking the shape of religion was particularly dangerous because these regimes tend to overturn the acquisitions made possible due to Enlightenment values

³²⁵ Jacques Maritain, *Humanisme intégral* (Paris: Fernand Aubier, 1936), pp. 215-219. Cited in Emilio Gentile, "The Sacralisation of Politics: Definitions, Interpretations and Reflections on the Question of Secular Religion and Totalitarianism." *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (2000), pp. 18-55.

³²⁶ Brigitte Gess, "The Conceptions of Totalitarianism of Raymond Aron and Hannah Arendt." Hans Meier (Ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume I: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1996]), p. 220.

³²⁷ Petersen, "The History of the Concept of Totalitarianism", p. 27.

by violating the private spheres of the people and abolishing the separation between the state and society.³²⁸ Juan J. Linz who lived in authoritarian Germany, and Spain, similarly pointed out how these regimes encroach the personal rights of the people by proposing their values as absolute truths. Linz described political religions as a “complex and multi-faceted phenomenon, a system of beliefs about authority, society and history, providing a comprehensive world vision, a *weltanschauung* that claims a truth-value incompatible with other views including the existing religious traditions”. Emilio Gentile, who wrote extensively about the concept defined it very similarly. Gentile stated that the political religions resemble “new churches devoted to propagandizing faith in absolute and unquestionable ideological truths, persecuting the unfaithful and worshipping sacralised human entities”. For Linz, the crucial sacralisation process includes attributing sacredness to secular “persons, places, symbols, dates, and the elaboration of rituals connected with them.” For instance, Lenin’s mausoleum, which was at least on paper a profane place in Durkheimian sense, was transformed into a sacred place through a series of parades, symbols, and ceremonies during the Soviet era.³²⁹ Similarly, in Nazi Germany, the profane concepts such as “blood and soil, people and Reich, Führer and flag” and the Nazi Party itself “elevated to the object of belief”. In political religions, agreeing with the official state ideology is not enough, members of the community must also “believe” in the sacredness of the ideology.³³⁰

In political religions, the transformation of the profane is usually initiated by a mostly elite group, which acts almost like a secular clergy. This group is controlled by the leader himself, through the instrumentality of several state apparatuses such as the education system or a mass political party. The group includes party members, bureaucrats, intellectuals, artists, academics, teachers, journalists and other public figures who can propagandize faith in the values represented by the regime. According to Gentile, the sacralisation process in political religions is not limited to the values, people and places related to the regime but it extends to the very sphere of politics,

³²⁸ Hans Meier, “Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships: Totalitarianism and Political Religions.” Hans Meier (Ed.), *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume I: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (London: Routledge, 2004 [1996]), p. 193.

³²⁹ Linz, “The Religious Use of Politics and/or the Political Use of Religion”, pp. 102-104.

³³⁰ Klaus Vondung, “Religious Faith in National Socialism.” Hans Maier & Michael Schäfer (Eds.) *Totalitarianism and Political Religions, Volume II: Concepts for the Comparison of Dictatorships* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 7.

and in time the religious and political dimensions merge with each other, and the regime takes over the features of a religion.³³¹ For Gentile, unlike ‘civil religions’, which refer to the secular belief systems that coexist with traditional, religious ones, political religions seek to replace the existing religions.³³² Stanley Payne suggests that political religions are arbitrary and totalising while civil religions are limited and tolerant and renounce any claim to control theistic religions. Payne also adds that while political religions expand the state’s power and try to atomise society, civil religions encourage voluntary associations.³³³

Promoting a Manichean world-view is one of the basic tenets of political religions. They claim that there is a cosmological battle between the forces of the light, represented by the political religion itself, and the forces of the dark, its political enemies. For most of the political religions, this eternal enemy is an external force and its internal agents. For instance, for Fascist Italy, the enemies were socialism, liberalism, their proxies in Italy and the supposed spiritual decadence emanated from these sources. In single-party Turkey, this celestial battle was fought between the single-party ideology and – not an external or even a material force – the country’s past. Single-party Turkey was an entity at war with its memories and was aiming to eradicate all remnants of the imperial, multi-cultural, Islamicate past through a series of modernizing reforms. Subordination of the religious authority was seen a necessity for the success of the regime. This characteristic of the Republican regime is in perfect accord with Linz’ theory on the hostile attitudes of political religions towards the traditional ones. Linz states that unlike civil religions, political religions do attempt to “compete with the existing religions, take their place and if possible destroy them”.³³⁴ The relations between Turkish authoritarianism and Islam fits well into this category.

Turkish authoritarianism never downplayed its revolutionary intentions concerning religion. It considered religion and the traditions that ensued from it as the main rivals to total state authority, as well as a reactionary force which must be controlled for the sake of the success of the modernization process. The competition between the new regime and the historical authority of the religious institutions

³³¹ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 45.

³³² Gentile & Mallett, “The Sacralisation of Politics.”, pp. 18-55.

³³³ Stanley G. Payne, “On the Heuristic Value of the Concept of Political Religion and Its Application.” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol. 6, Issue 2 (2005), pp. 163-174.

³³⁴ Linz, “The Religious Use of Politics and/or the Political Use of Religion”, pp. 102-103.

implies a comparable situation to Mosse's interpretation of the rivalry between the National Socialism and Christianity. In Mosse's opinion "National Socialism was a religion; the depth of the ideology, the liturgy, the element of hope, all helped to give the movement the character of a new faith ... Christianity was a rival, not a friend."³³⁵ Similarly in Turkey, Islam and the Islamic identity were the strongest rivals of the single-party regime.

In Turkey, the single-party regime wanted to totally control Islam. To achieve this goal in November 1925 it closed all voluntary religious associations including the Sufi religious orders (*Tarikat*) which represented the almost infinite various permutations of heterodox Islam and dominated the spiritual and social life in the empire, specifically in the rural areas. This led to the diminution of the visibility of the Islamic religion in the social sphere. Furthermore in 1924, the regime terminated the authority of the caliphate, a papal-like institution which harboured claims of world-wide jurisdiction over every Muslim, closed the Ministry of Religious Affairs which was itself a continuation of the office of Sheik ul-Islam³³⁶ that "governed an elaborate hierarchy of religious officials including judges, juris consults, and religious teachers"³³⁷ and to replace them, it established a state agency called Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) which became the sole authority over religious matters and promoted a modernised, Turkified, and westernized version of Islam. In this era, religion was allowed to exist and thrive only in the boundaries which were determined by the state.

The establishment of a political religion as a Republican state policy is studied rarely and when it is done, the results tend to be far from accurate. For instance Payne suggests that Republican Turkey created "a more limited civil religion".³³⁸ Plaggenborg goes a step further and paradoxically suggests that although the single-party regime used a religious terminology when establishing a cult of Atatürk and the

³³⁵ George L. Mosse, *Nazi Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. xxxi.

³³⁶ Sheik ul-Islam was the highest ranking individual in the religious bureaucracy of the Ottoman Empire. Scholars appointed to this position were the most important religious figures in the Empire as well as being the chief jurists until 1916 when the authority of the office was reduced and its jurisdiction over the courts was transferred to the Ministry of Justice. For the historical development of the office of Sheik ul-Islam see Richard W. Bulliet, "The Shaikh al-Islam and the Evolution of Islamic Society," *Studia Islamica*, No. 35 (1972), pp. 53-67, and R.C. Repp, *The Mufti of Istanbul: A Study in the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy* (London: Ithaca Press, 1986).

³³⁷ Bulliet, "The Shaikh al-Islam."

³³⁸ Payne, p. 170.

Republican imagery and language had a religious colouring, the regime did not even create a "civil religion".³³⁹ If we examine Gentile's taxonomy of political and civil religions, we see that civil religions do live side by side with traditional religions and various secular ideologies.³⁴⁰ That is hardly true about the Turkish authoritarianism of 1930s. Turkish authoritarianism did not coexist with other ideologies and political movements. No ideology, whether it was religious or secular, except what was promoted by the regime was allowed to organize and promote its values and ideas. Gentile adds that in civil religions "the full autonomy of the individual from the collective" is recognized and this is not the case for Turkish authoritarianism. In early Republican Turkey the individual was seen merely as a member, an integral part of a coherent, cohesive monolith of a society which was perceived to be undivided by any ideological, gender-related or class-based differences and was described by Peker, the Secretary-General of the single-party as "a national bloc".³⁴¹ In Republican discourse the interests of this bloc should always trump the rights of the individual, as Peker stated people should not be allowed to "have their own way" and should work together to reach the common goals set by the regime.³⁴² According to Republican doxa, the individual was seen as void of any previous ideological or spiritual engagement, almost as a *tabula rasa* on which the regime could build a new Republican identity from scratch.

This hostile attitude of the early Republican regime towards ideologies, beliefs and individuality led to the restriction of almost any form of self-expression such as belonging to an internationalist movement, displaying commitment in the public sphere to the religious, ethnic and denominational identities other than what was dictated by the regime since these acts were all perceived as separatism. In the 1930s the government even acted to close and absorb the social and cultural associations that were formerly sponsored and encouraged by the state, such as the Turkish Women's Union and Turkish Hearths which further restrained the people's ability of expressing their identities while concurrently undermining the interpretation of the Turkish authoritarianism as a civil religion that recognized the legality of the existence of other ideologies and beliefs besides the principles promoted by the regime. Atatürk justified

³³⁹ Plaggenborg, p. 204.

³⁴⁰ Gentile & Mallett, p. 24.

³⁴¹ *Tan*, February 24, 1936.

³⁴² Peker, *İnkılap Dersleri*, pp. 59-64.

the closing of these institutions as “gathering similar forces together and moving in the same direction to reach the definite goals”.³⁴³ Along with these state-sponsored organizations, other non-governmental organizations such as the Masonic Lodges were closed on the premise of “being connected to foreign powers or interests”. The formation of class-based associations was already forbidden. The single-party regime did not even acknowledge the existence of various social classes in the first place.

As these examples demonstrate, showing collective loyalty to religion, ethnicity, gender, ideology or class was not permitted during this era. Therefore defining Turkish authoritarianism as a civil religion is an implausible interpretation of the facts. The regime did not want to create an ideology that would peacefully co-exist with other ideologies, it sought rather to replace them. As the previous chapters show, Republican ideology was totalising, aggressive and intolerant against other values and ideas. It discouraged voluntary social organizations, restricted religious beliefs, political opinions, different forms of belongingness to ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, gender or social class and restrained the formation of collective identities to a domain limited within the state, and did not give them any room to thrive. To fill the void left behind by these forms of self-expression the regime built up a political religion based on the sacralisation of the secular personalities, entities and objects.

The Process of the Sacralisation of the Secular in Turkey

Gentile states that political religions are established after a process of “sacralisation” which occurs when the primacy of a collective secular entity is consecrated, such conceptions are incorporated into a code, members are considered an elect community with a messianic function to fulfil a mission, and a political liturgy and sacred history are formulated.³⁴⁴ We can observe that these steps were also taken by the Turkish single-party. First of all, the party was presented to the people not as a “regular” political party but as a special, almost sacred entity. The Republican People’s Party argued that it was a direct continuation of the Defence of Rights Group of Anatolia and Rumelia, the central organization which was responsible of building up the

³⁴³ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 130.

³⁴⁴ Gentile & Mallett, p. 24.

national resistance against the occupation of Anatolia. Most members of the A-RMHC became parliament members after the establishment of the Grand National Assembly in Ankara on April 23, 1920 and contributed to the “national struggle” which was ended with the victory of the nationalist forces in 1922.

A-RMHC was an umbrella body where various ideologies, beliefs and identities were represented and united to reach a common, definite goal of ending the occupation and restoring national sovereignty. Republican People’s Party publications claimed that the party was the sole heir of this rich and diverse tradition and stated that the RPP was “unlike any other political party, hence it was not founded from domestic political considerations. The party was founded during the War of Independence. It was founded due the necessities”.³⁴⁵ To further accentuate this assumption, the First Grand Congress of the party, which was held in October 1927, was officially recognized as the second congress, while the Sivas Congress (*Sivas Kongresi*), the temporary assembly of the Turkish national movement that was held for one week from 4 to 11 September 1919 in the eastern Anatolian city of Sivas and participated by all factions of the A-RMHC, was recognized retrospectively as the inaugural party congress. With this claim, the history of the party was consubstantiated with the emergence, planning, and execution processes of the Turkish War of Independence while, in contrast, the opposition which came to existence during and after the war were excluded from this shared political inheritance although they also originated from the same A-RMHC background and the War of Independence experience.

This distortion of history proved to be crucially important because it managed to help the RPP to monopolize the success of the diverse nationalist movement, to present the party as “a political organisation which was put into existence at a turning-point in Turkish history in order to carry out a special mission,”³⁴⁶ and eventually, to obtain legitimacy for the policies of the party. For the single-party its own existence was much more legal, important, rightful and significant than any other political organization, and was inseparable from the victory obtained in the Turkish War of Independence. This self-proclaimed peculiarity was frequently exploited by the party as a non-sequitur to prove the constant rightfulness and legitimacy of their political decisions and actions. Hence the single-party was the entity that had saved the country

³⁴⁵ *CHP - Millet Hizmetinde 40 Yıl*, p. 5.

³⁴⁶ Karpas, “The Republican People’s Party.”, p. 45.

and established the republic; disagreeing with its policies was not just politically wrong, it was also ethically unjust to the point of ‘heresy’ and conflicted with the national interests. From this ideological standpoint, every form of opposition regardless of its ideological stance, from socialists to liberals, from conservatives to Islamists were harmful for the future of the country being either “an obstacle to development, modernization and westernization or a threat against the national unity, national interest or *raison d’être*,”³⁴⁷ therefore they needed to be excluded from political life, be isolated, incarcerated and even in some cases terminated.

The fate of the Progressive Republican Party, the first significant opposition party of the Republic which was established in late 1924 is a clear example of this attitude of the regime. Among its members, the party had a wide array of prominent figures of the late Ottoman elite, war heroes and important actors of the Turkish War of Independence. With eminent names such as Karabekir, Bele, and Orbay within its ranks and a more liberal party programme, it was only natural that the PRP would become a serious contender for power and a fierce rival of the Republican People’s Party.

At first, Atatürk seemed unimpressed by the new party. In a *London Times* interview, he stated that the party had nothing new or worthy to talk about that differentiated it from the Republican People’s Party and justified its existence.³⁴⁸ Zürcher states that he even gone further in the interview and emphasized that “their republicanism is a sham, their party programme is fake, and they are themselves nothing but reactionaries” but later asked the *Times* reporter to leave these comments out of the final interview.³⁴⁹ From these accusations, only the last one seems to be a bit plausible due to the anger and discontent shown by some members of the new party towards the abrogation of the caliphate, but interpreting these complaints as reactionary activity stretches the meaning of reactionary considerably. Nevertheless, one year later, the party would be closed on the premises of supporting the Sheikh Said Revolt and its founders were put on trial for accusations on the grounds of their participation in an assassination attempt targeting Atatürk. This attitude which

³⁴⁷ Ahmet İnsel, “Cumhuriyet Döneminde Otoritarizmin Sürekliliği.” *Birikim*, no. 125-126 (September-October 1999), pp. 143-149.

³⁴⁸ Interview with Times on 11.12.1924, in Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 109.

³⁴⁹ Erik-Jan Zürcher, “Atatürk ve 1924’teki Çok Partili Demokrasi.” *Tarih ve Toplum*, no. 49 (January 1988), pp. 16-19.

constantly questioned the legitimacy of the opposition and glorified the ruling-party continued throughout the single-party era.

Following Gentile's model on the establishment of the political religions, the second step is the incorporation of the sacralisation of the secular entities into code which was completed in Republican Turkey in 1930s. Subsequent to the closing of every single opposition party in 1930, the single-party regime was firmly established officially in 1931. In the same year basic tenets of the party were put together in the form of six fundamental and inalterable principles, known as the 'Six Arrows'³⁵⁰ which forged the framework of the single-party ideology and after being integrated into the constitution in the constitutional amendment of 1937; determined the ideological boundaries of the Turkish Republic.

The third and final step in the sacralisation of the ruling party was the glorification of its history which was taken in October 1927, when President Mustafa Kemal delivered *Nutuk* (The Great Speech), his thirty-nine hour speech at the Second Grand Congress of the Republican People's Party, and presented the events from 1919 to that day from his own perspective. Throughout the speech Kemal discussed the weaknesses and deficiencies of his contemporary political enemies whom he recently silenced after the closing of the Progressive Republican Party. Although they contributed to the war effort and national resistance right from the start of the War of Independence, due to the political rivalry between them and Mustafa Kemal, he either downplayed their importance or dismissed their contributions altogether. In *Nutuk*, Kemal targeted the opposition members from the start and depicted them mostly as incompetent persons. In his vision the national struggle was won not with their help but despite their "narrowmindedness" and "constant obstructions".

A perfect example of this approach is visible in the section of the speech which dealt with the preparation of the Amasya Circular (*Amasya Tamimi*) in June 1919 which is considered the document which set the Turkish War of Independence in motion. Kazım Karabekir, Rauf Orbay and Refet Bele either personally signed the document or were consulted during its drafting. Fearing that this fact would prove the claims of these opposition members that the war effort was a joint action and not

³⁵⁰ Section 2, Article 1 of the RPP Party Programme of 1931 stated that the "RPP is republican, nationalist, populist, statist, secular and revolutionary." *CHP Nizamnamesi ve Programı, 1931*, p. 31.

planned and executed by Kemal alone, while narrating the discussions in Amasya, Mustafa Kemal depicted them as incapable people who have signed this document reluctantly only after his persuasion.³⁵¹ To emphasize the reluctance shown by these military officials, during his speech he even presented the original document to the Party Congress and asked his fellow party members to check how frail Refet Bele's signature was.

This example and many others show that Mustafa Kemal created a narrative of the events of the Turkish War of Independence that put himself at the centre and depicted the other important actors as reluctant, narrow minded, cowardly and virtually useless figures who almost caused the movement more harm than good. Not unexpectedly, this narrative is used to support, in fact even to whitewash, his decision to expel these old colleagues from the political sphere. Therefore we can conclude that the Great Speech settled all of the conflicts of this period in Mustafa Kemal's favour, thus establishing the official historiography for the events between the Turkish War of Independence and 1927. After the Great Speech the history of the party and Turkey became sacred and inalterable. For instance, in 1934, "Our Independence War" (*İstiklal Harbimiz*), another historical account dealing with the same period was banned. This book was written as a response to *Nutuk*,³⁵² by Kâzım Karabekir who was forced to live in political obscurity and under strict state surveillance after the closing of his party and the allegations on his participation to the assassination attempt against Atatürk.³⁵³ All copies of the book were confiscated and burned subsequently because it offered a different historical account for the events of the Turkish War of Independence.³⁵⁴ For the decades that followed, the Great Speech remained the central historical source for the Turkish historiography on the era, which further cemented the role of Atatürk as a saviour with a unique vision for the country.

In time this unique vision would become the sole permissible ideology surrounding every component of society, invading every single aspect of the social

³⁵¹ Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Nutuk* (Istanbul: YKY, 2011 [1927]), p. 35.

³⁵² In fact, due this book being a critique of *Nutuk*, Zürcher calls it as the "*anti-Nutuk*". For Zürcher's analysis of *İstiklal Harbimiz*, see Erik-Jan Zürcher, "Young Turk Memoirs as a Historical Source: Kazım Karabekir's *İstiklal Harbimiz*." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 22, Issue 4 (1986), pp. 562-570.

³⁵³ Karabekir was under constant surveillance starting from 1926. Although he was officially pardoned and made a MP after the death of Atatürk by his successor İnönü, the surveillance continued until 1943. For more information see the reports on Karabekir's activities in Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry, BCA: 121..10.0.0/ 2.7..1./122522-1 and BCA: 121..10.0.0/ 2.8..1./122522-2.

³⁵⁴ BCA: 30..10.0.0/ 45.290...41. /3741

relations from education to administration, from culture to art. Therefore it is impossible to overlook the importance of the role of the leaders of the Early Republican era when dealing the establishment of the Turkish political religion. During the formative years of the single-party rule, the sacralisation of the party, its principles, and its history were closely linked with the process of establishing personality cults for its leaders, especially the two presidents of the single-party era; Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and İsmet İnönü.

The Cult of Atatürk

In the Turkish single-party regime, presidents Atatürk and İnönü were unaccountable to any legal body or the masses. On paper, there was a parliament and a cabinet of ministers led by a prime minister who were accountable to public opinion but following the demise of the Progressive Republican Party in 1925, the parliament had lost all of its impartiality and become a mechanism to ratify the political agenda of the Presidents. The parliamentary elections which were held every five years did not give the people any power to control the political sphere. First of all, there were no other parties than the ruling Republican People's Party competing in the elections. Secondly, the electoral system was designed specifically to prevent any surprises, such as the possibility of the election of the independent candidates. The republican electoral system was a two-staged system. In the first stage, electors chose the second stage voters from a list of party representatives which had been determined by the party centre. These party representatives would vote in the second stage for a list of parliamentary candidates that was also predetermined by the party. There was just one list on the ballots for the second stage voters to approve. No ordinary citizen, member of the opposition or independent local party member could stand for election on his or her own initiative. Until 1927, the task of finalizing the list of the parliament members was left to the joint action of the party council but after that date with a change of regulations, Mustafa Kemal started to handpick all of the MPs by himself.³⁵⁵ In summary the election process was just an elaborate confirmation mechanism of the decision made by the President without taking the interests of the local population into

³⁵⁵ Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, pp. 180-181.

consideration. Naturally this process made the parliament powerless to curb the authority of the Presidents.

Without the presence of a strong parliament, political parties, or social organizations either secular in nature such as Turkish Hearths and Women's Union or religious ones such as the Sufi orders, the entire political and social spheres were left to the single-party, and its chief, the President. As previously mentioned, in this era, other actors that usually competed for political power in Turkey, such as the military, were also tamed by the regime. With all societal and political actors were either coerced or having opted for collaboration with the regime, it is more than plausible to state that presidents Atatürk and İnönü enjoyed limitless, unrestricted power.

There were two main sources for the legitimacy of the rule of the Presidents during the early Republican era. First, there was an apparent legality embedded within the system stemming from the existence of elections, a parliament and a cabinet, making it resemble a parliamentary democracy although the two-stage elections were nothing but an intricate acclamation of the President's list, and the parliament and cabinet were merely apparatuses of the President's will. Nevertheless, the regime used these elements to show that the Presidents had the backing of the entire nation.³⁵⁶ Secondly, and more importantly, the regime derived legitimacy from the personality of the two leaders to acquire the much needed popular support, by promoting the personal cults of the presidents.

It should be noted that in many countries, regimes attribute importance to several figures from the nation's history, especially famous soldiers and politicians who contributed to the nation building process. Many nation states fondly remember the "Founding Fathers" of their nations such as Bolivar, Garibaldi, San Martin, and Washington. Therefore one might find the significance assigned to Atatürk, the war hero who led the national struggle successfully and İnönü, who was Atatürk's right-hand man, sounding board, and favourite Prime Minister while also being a more than adequate military officer on his own, quite usual. Yet, the boundaries between remembrance and glorification proved to be rather thick. In Republican Turkey, Atatürk and İnönü were not just revered as heroes, but their presences filled every

³⁵⁶ It should be noted that elections in authoritarian states are not a rarity, most of them used them similarly to the Turkish example which is to show that the regime has the support of the people. See Hague and Harrop, *Comparative Government and Politics*, p. 14.

sphere of life. Furthermore, their ideas were made into an ideology. The introduction part of the RPP programme of 1935 stated that from date on, the Six Arrows, the principles pursued by the party will be “referred as the principles of *Kemalism*”, named after President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.³⁵⁷ Considering that in 1937, these principles were integrated to the constitution as unalterable characteristics of the state, one can state that the regime christened its ideology, its existence with the name of its president. Therefore the boundaries between remembrance and glorification were clearly crossed in the early Republican era. The regime was personified in its leader.

The establishment of the personality cults of the Turkish leaders began by praising their statuses as war heroes. When they became leading figures of Turkish politics after the War of Independence, their vision, leadership qualities, and political acumen were also celebrated. All of these qualities can be summarized as their personal magnetism, in other words, their charisma. Since the main source of legitimacy of the regime was the personality cults of the leaders, the Republican style of rule of the era falls within the boundaries of charismatic leadership.

Charismatic leadership was described by Weber as one of the three forms of legitimisation of political domination and as “the authority of the extraordinary and personal spiritual gift, the absolutely personal devotion and personal confidence in revelation, heroism, or other qualities of individual leadership”.³⁵⁸ Charisma as the main source of political legitimacy thus is a radical rejection of “traditional” and “legal-rational” forms of authority. In traditional form of legitimacy, the authority derives from custom and passed one sovereign to the following generation in a hereditary way. In the legal-rational pattern, the authority comes from rationally-created rules. The traditional form of political domination is common in monarchies, while the legal-rational form is prevalent in democracies. The charismatic form is frequently visible in authoritarian states and political religions. Similarly in Republican Turkey, the regime employed the charismatic domination of the masses by the presidents Atatürk and İnönü to legitimize itself and to survive.

Charisma as a political weapon can be categorized in two types; natural and manufactured. Natural charisma is defined as being spontaneously derived from the

³⁵⁷ *CHP Programı, 1935*, p. 2.

³⁵⁸ Weber, *Politik als Beruf*, p. 5.

qualities and successes of the leader, while manufactured or synthetic charisma is used to be fabricated by the utilization of media.³⁵⁹ Although this categorization is problematic because it is evident that even the natural charisma employs the power of the media and contains a certain level of artificiality, here it serves a purpose to make a distinction between the two presidents of the era. Atatürk's personality with its spontaneity, unpredictability, his ability to shape the masses according to his will and his heroic deeds as a war hero fit better to the natural variation of charisma, while İnönü who was a more careful, conservative politician who tried to continue the ruling style of Atatürk in a much measured way fits with the later model.

The charismatic domination Atatürk had over the people of Turkey started even before his reign as a President. He became a semi-popular name before the War of Independence when he was first recognized as one of the heroes of the successful Dardanelles campaign.³⁶⁰ On October 1915, his photo and a brief inscription which described him as the "glorious defender of the Dardanelles" were published on the front page of the *Tasvir-i Efkar* newspaper.³⁶¹ In March 1918, he was mentioned as a heroic figure in an interview³⁶² conducted by Ruşen Eşref Üneydin.³⁶³ In March 1919, the famous author and poet Yahya Kemal Beyatlı³⁶⁴ wrote in *Büyük Mecmua*

³⁵⁹ Ronald Glassman, "Legitimacy and Manufactured Charisma." *Social Research*, Vol. 42, No. 4 (Winter 1975), pp. 615-536; and Richard Ling "The Production of Synthetic Charisma." *Journal of Political and Military Sociology*, No. 15 (1987), pp. 157-170.

³⁶⁰ The Dardanelles or Gallipoli Campaign (April 1915-January 1916) was fought on the Gallipoli peninsula between the Allied Powers and the Ottoman Empire during the First World War. With this campaign Allied Forces aimed to control the strategically important Turkish Straits which separate the Black Sea from the Aegean Sea. Securing the straits would have also relieved Russia and could have led to the occupation of Istanbul which would leave the Ottoman Empire out of the war. The battles started with a series of naval attacks and continued with an amphibious landing. Mustafa Kemal, as a lieutenant colonel commanded a division which proved to be vital for the defence of the peninsula. The battles ended with an Ottoman victory and Mustafa Kemal was promoted to the rank of colonel.

³⁶¹ Sadi Borak, *Atatürk'ün İstanbul'daki Çalışmaları (1899-16 Mayıs 1919)* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 1988), pp. 75-80.

³⁶² Ruşen Eşref Üneydin, "Anafartalar Kumandanı Mustafa Kemal ile Mülakat." *Yeni Mecmua - Çanakkale nüsha-i mümtâzesi*, Vol. III (1918), pp. 130-143. The interview was later released in book form in 1930. Ruşen Eşref Üneydin, *Anafartalar Kumandanı Mustafa Kemal ile Mülakat* (Istanbul: Hamit Matbaası, 1930).

³⁶³ Ruşen Eşref Üneydin (1892-1959) was a journalist, author and diplomat. After conducting the aforementioned interview with Mustafa Kemal, he joined the nationalist cause in Ankara and became one of the members of Atatürk's most inner circle. He served as a RPP parliament member from 1923 until 1933 when he became the secretary-general to the President Atatürk. From 1934 until his retirement in 1952 he served as the ambassador respectively in Tirana, Athens, Budapest, Rome and London.

³⁶⁴ Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884-1958) was one of the most prominent poets of the late-Ottoman and Republican periods. Kemal became a supporter of the Young Turk movement during his studies in Paris. During the war and the following national struggle he wrote numerous articles to support the nationalist course. After the success of the nationalists, Atatürk assigned Kemal to the delegation which represented Turkey in Lausanne. Kemal later served as a diplomat and parliament member from the

magazine, that apart from the military success of the campaign, the battles “earned [Turkey] Mustafa Kemal”.³⁶⁵ The rest of the article defined Mustafa Kemal as “a young, diligent, and resolute commander” and “a great hero ... whose name will be written in golden letters of history” due to the skills and leadership he showed during the battles at the Dardanelles. Another article describing him as an “exceptional commander whose reputation and fame soared after the last war” was published in November 1919, in daily newspaper *Minber*.³⁶⁶ The story of this article is rather interesting and contributes greatly to the debate on natural and manufactured charisma. According to Falih Rıfkı Atay,³⁶⁷ a member of Atatürk’s most inner circle, Atatürk was a part-owner of this newspaper along his close friend Ali Fethi Okyar. Furthermore, he could have either contributed articles on his own to this publication or suggested what kinds of articles should be written as well.³⁶⁸ Therefore the aforementioned article which further described him “one of the greatest commanders of the army” who “protected the capital from occupation by being the sole hero of the great battles [at the Dardanelles]” should be approached sceptically. In addition, this connection he had with *Minber* suggests that Atatürk actively sought to promote himself as a leadership candidate before his arrival to Anatolia, and influence the political sphere by increasing or creating his own charisma.

In fact, despite his obvious military skills, Mustafa Kemal needed every kind of publicity, because although being known for his military expertise, politically Mustafa Kemal operated for most of his political career on the fringes of the main events. Born in 1881, in Salonica, in the European Turkey, to a middle-class family, Kemal had no family connections that could help his ambitions but nevertheless he managed to have a good education first at the Military High School in Manastır (Bitola) (1896-1899), later at the Ottoman Military Academy (1899-1902) and at the Ottoman Military College in Istanbul (1902-1905). Blacklisted due to his political activities in the military college, after his graduation Kemal did not get appointed to a

ruling party. His poetry which combined elements of traditional *diwan* poetry, Turkish nationalism, cultural Islam and French Romanticism made him one of the most celebrated poets of Turkish language.

³⁶⁵ Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, “Büyüklerimiz.” *Büyük Mecmua*, No. 3 (March 1919), p. 148.

³⁶⁶ Zeki Arıkan, “Atatürk’le İlgili Eski Bir Belge.” *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, No. 15 (1989), pp. 607-612.

³⁶⁷ Falih Rıfkı Atay (1894-1971) was a journalist, author and politician who remained as a close confidant of Atatürk until his death. Atay served as a Parliament member from RPP continuously from 1923 to 1950. As a journalist, throughout his career he wrote for the newspapers close to the regime, mostly as an editor-in-chief. Atay was also a prolific author of travel literature and memoirs.

³⁶⁸ Falih Rıfkı Atay, *Çankaya* (Istanbul: Betas, 1984 [1961]), p.225.

post in European Turkey and was sent to the Syrian part of the Empire. In Damascus he first showed the ability to effect his surroundings and took over the leadership of the Motherland and Freedom (*Vatan ve Hürriyet*) organization despite being challenged by other candidates of superior rank. He succeeded in returning to European Turkey in 1907 and opened a branch of the Motherland and Freedom in Salonica but his small political group was dissolved in the much more potent Ottoman Committee of Freedom (*Osmanlı Hürriyet Cemiyeti*) which was later merged with the Committee of Union and Progress, the group that organized the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 and later became the ruling party of the Ottoman Empire.

Within this much larger committee Mustafa Kemal who was junior to the main political actors of the era, once again drifted to the fringes of the political centre.³⁶⁹ There are different accounts as to why he was relegated to obscurity. According to Cebesoy, he and Kemal too openly criticized the policies of the CUP and their outspokenness led to their exclusion from the top ranks. Kemal's personal clashes with his superior Enver Pasha, one of the leaders of the party and one of the most powerful men in the Empire, did not help his cause either.³⁷⁰ Even after his first success at the Dardanelles which made him a respected name his talent was not rightly recognized by the upper echelons of the party and he was denied a promotion to the rank of a general. Nevertheless, his military success continued in the Eastern campaign where the Ottoman army managed to stop the Russian army temporarily at Bitlis and Muş. By 1917, he was still not in the top echelons of the party but his successes landed him the potentially key role of being the advisor to Prince Vahdettin, the heir apparent to the Ottoman throne. A year later the Prince became the Sultan and Kemal wanted to magnify his own influence through his authority but Vahdettin proved to be too cautious to follow Kemal's guidance and passed up the chance to take a firm grip on power at the expense of the ruling CUP. Nevertheless, not being in the top echelons of CUP helped Kemal eventually, after the utter defeat of the Ottoman Empire at the end of the war, he did not fall from grace like other notable CUP members.

Following the occupation of the capital Istanbul by the Allied Powers, most influential members of the Committee, such as the members of the ruling triumvirate,

³⁶⁹ For more information on Mustafa Kemal's status within the Committee of Union and Progress see Zürcher, *Milli Mücadelede İttihatçılık*, pp. 77-109.

³⁷⁰ Sina Akşin, "Mustafa Kemal'in İktidar Yolu." Tarık Zafer Tunaya (Ed.) *Çağdaş Düşüncenin Işığında Atatürk* (Istanbul: Eczacıbaşı Vakfı, 1983), pp. 55-56.

Talat, Enver and Cemal departed the Empire with the help of their German allies. This escape intensified the opposition which was already established both within and outside of the Committee and combining with the people's dissatisfaction with the way CUP handled the war effort and ruled the Empire, it created a huge backlash against them.³⁷¹ Therefore, not being a significant member of the Committee helped Mustafa Kemal on two interrelated levels. First, he was still respected by the people and his military colleagues despite the general defeat, and secondly, the new government that replaced the Unionist cabinet found in him a reputable officer untainted by Unionist politics which secured him a crucial post in Anatolia, the centre of the flourishing nationalist movement. The government decided to send a willing Mustafa Kemal to inspect the situation in Anatolia to satisfy the demands of the Allies who had concerns regarding the establishment of self-defence committees against the occupation, lack of public order, and the situation of the religious minorities. Allied Powers feared that the Allied occupation could cause reprisal attacks from the armed resistance members against the local Christians. To secure public order and prevent these attacks, this office equipped Mustafa Kemal with extensive and wide-ranging authority.³⁷² Therefore when he arrived to Anatolia in 1919 as the Inspector to the 9th Army, he was reputable and powerful enough to present himself as a suitable candidate for the leadership of the fledgling nationalist resistance.

When the Greeks occupied Izmir in May 1919 on behalf of the Allied powers, the Anatolian nationalists severed their ties with the government in Istanbul. Among the generals and high-ranking bureaucrats of the nationalist movement, Mustafa Kemal came to the fore for several reasons. First, he had a suitable military background. Furthermore, to other household names he was either ranked superior or his reputation was less tainted since he was not a part of the CUP ruling clique which suffered a devastating defeat in the First World War. He was one of the obvious choices for the leadership of the Defence of Rights Group of Anatolia and Rumelia. In August 1919, Mustafa Kemal was chosen as the Head of the Representative Committee (*Heyet-i Temsiliye*), the temporary executive branch of the nationalist

³⁷¹ For an assessment of the rising opposition within the party after the escape of the CUP leaders, see Osman Demirbaş, "Liderlerinin Yurt Dışına Kaçması Üzerine İttihat ve Terakki İçinde Meydana Gelen Tepkiler." *Yakın Dönem Türkiye Araştırmaları*, No. 1 (2002), pp. 145-155.

³⁷² Some of the subjects of Kemal's jurisdiction in Anatolia were: Two army corps under his direct control, the authority to control the armies located in the surrounding areas, and the authority over the civil governors of his area of control and the surrounding regions. See Atatürk, *Nutuk*, pp. 8-10.

movement. In the following months between his arrival in Anatolia and the establishment of the National Assembly in Ankara, Mustafa Kemal successfully defended his position as the leader of the nationalist movement against the supporters of a United States mandate for the remaining parts of the empire, activists who sought the independence of their respective regions of Anatolia instead of the liberation of the whole country³⁷³ and the Istanbul government that sought to punish him after his defection to the nationalist cause. Subsequently to the establishment of the National Assembly he used his influence to get selected for the office of the Speaker of the Parliament in Ankara in April 1920. Through this office he also acted as the head of government and gained further power. In summary, his military record during the First World War provided him a sound basis on which he started to construct a lasting legacy with the help of his wide-ranging realm of authority, intellect, political acumen, talent for organization and personal charisma. In the following months, he began to eliminate the burgeoning opposition against him step-by-step and paved the way to the personal rule which would eventually end with the establishment of his cult of personality.

The Transition from Parliamentary System to the Personal Rule

When the parliament was opened in Ankara on April 23, 1920, Turkey already had a brief yet intense experience with parliamentarism from the First and Second Constitutional Eras. The parliament in Ankara, the Grand National Assembly as a successor of this tradition, proved to be very dynamic. Actions of the government and even the military decisions of the general staff were dissected and debated vividly which made the assembly difficult to control. This pushed Mustafa Kemal to follow a more cautious approach since his position was still unstable in his early days at the office. There were other significant factors that contributed to his alertness. The most significant of these was the fragile military power of Ankara. Due to the lack of a central army, the government in Ankara was only able to deal with the military actions

³⁷³ For instance, during the War of Independence, the Defence of Rights Organization in Thrace pushed for a liberated, united Thrace including the Western Thrace which was lost to Greece and Bulgaria in the Balkan Wars. (1912-1913) Mustafa Kemal tried to keep this movement under control because he wanted to limit the aims of the nationalist resistance to ending the occupation which followed the World War. He considered that rekindling irredentist claims for territories lost before the war would harm the legitimacy of the nationalist movement. See Atatürk, *Nutuk*, pp. 397-401.

funded by the Istanbul government and Anatolian people's apathy for the nationalist struggle or in some cases their downright hostility towards the nationalists in Ankara through the instrumentality of the irregular forces. Furthermore, the fledgling nationalist resistance was having troubles of gaining the trust of the countryside which was caught between the civil war between the rival governments in Istanbul and Ankara, and infected by food shortages and lack of public order. In addition to this chaos, the CUP elite in exile were still casting long shadows over the new capital, and finally the political sphere in the city was in turmoil especially due to mushrooming of new socialist organizations which were founded to obtain Soviet help for the Turkish cause.³⁷⁴ In these chaotic circumstances Kemal slowly but surely altered the parliamentary regime into a personal rule yet managed to keep the legal appearance.

His tendencies bordering on an authoritarian attitude started very early in September 1920 when he directly interfered to replace the legally elected Minister of the Interior Dr. Nâzım Resmor, a confessed socialist. When Resmor was elected by the Parliament to this post in expense of Kemal's own candidate Refet Bele, he intervened with the process, and asked Resmor to step down.³⁷⁵ Resmor was the Secretary-General and the author of the party charter of the Green Army (*Yeşil Ordu Cemiyeti*), the most significant of the numerous socialist organizations which were established in Ankara after the rapprochement with the Soviets. Green Army was favouring the unification of the social aspects of Islam, especially the Islamic charity with the political ideals of Communism to create a localized, Islamicised version of socialism.³⁷⁶ After Resmor stepped down, Kemal claimed that he and his friends were "spies for foreign organizations"³⁷⁷ and sent him to the Independence Courts. In May 1921 Resmor was sentenced to 15 years of hard labour but he was released in September without serving his full sentence by courtesy of a general amnesty which further proves that the accusations of treason and being a servant of foreign interests were far-fetched or more probably entirely unfounded. Regardless of Dr. Nâzım's fate, the process of his forced resignation and the following accusations served the needs

³⁷⁴ For a detailed list and histories of these organizations see Mete Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Sol Akımlar, Cilt 1, 1908-1925* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2009 [1967]), pp. 258-367.

³⁷⁵ Dr. Nâzım won the election by 98 to 65 votes against Kemal's candidate Refet Bele. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre I, Cilt 3, p. 518.

³⁷⁶ For more information on this organization, see Mukaddes Arslan, "Yakın Dönem Tarihimizde Yeşil Ordu Cemiyeti'ne Toplu Bir Bakış." *Atatürk Araştırma Merkezi Dergisi*, Cilt XVII, No. 51 (2001).

³⁷⁷ Atatürk, *Nutuk*, pp. 490-491.

of Mustafa Kemal. Following the incident, to prevent anything similar from happening again, Mustafa Kemal forced the Grand National Assembly to change the regulations concerning the selection of ministers in November 1920. Up to that point ministers were selected from a list of candidates nominated by their fellow deputies. The Assembly established the government among its own members following a democratic process which made the political sphere more pluralistic. The new regulations which stated that “the ministers will be elected from among the candidates nominated by the Speaker of the Parliament” – in this case Mustafa Kemal himself – changed this situation.³⁷⁸ This modification made Kemal even more powerful at the expense of the assembly and can be regarded as the first step to from the parliamentary rule to a more personal one.

After this event Kemal managed to find success both in the political and military spheres. Internally, he took the politics of the new capital under close control by disbanding the organic socialist movement in Ankara. The Green Army was closed and a puppet Communist Party was established to control the socialist scene. This was followed by victories in the Eastern Front. Starting from September 1920, the Eastern forces of the Ankara Government which were led by Kâzım Karabekir started to gain ground at the expense of the newly established republic of Armenia and quickly recovered the Eastern territories lost during the war. Following their success the military corps which were stationed in the East started to return to the Western Front where a joint army of regular and irregular forces were trying to stop the Greek advance. In January 1921, Mustafa Kemal decided to disband the irregular forces who had been crucial in suppressing numerous uprisings that took place in the countryside against the Ankara government. A small scale civil war between the regular and irregular forces ensued until the defeat of the most important paramilitary leader of the irregular forces, Çerkes Ethem.³⁷⁹ After Ethem who was also influential in the socialist Green Army took refuge with the Greeks on February 2, 1921, Kemal strengthened his position as the sole leader of the nationalist movement.

The next step for the personal rule came in August 1921 in the form of the Law on Supreme Military Command (*Başkomutanlık Yasası*). To understand the nature and

³⁷⁸ For the text of the law, see *Resmî Gazete*, No. 8 (March 28, 1921), Law No. 47, p. 1.

³⁷⁹ Ryan Gingeras, *Sorrowful Shores Violence, Ethnicity, and the End of the Ottoman Empire, 1912–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 123.

importance of this law, we should briefly discuss the preceding events and the state of the nationalist war effort. Mustafa Kemal was aware that despite his purge of Dr. Nâzım and his friends, and the elimination of Çerkes Ethem and other paramilitary leaders, the opposition within the parliament was still strong. According to him, the members of the opposition established several groups within the National Assembly to delay the decision making process of the parliament. Mustafa Kemal further claimed in *Nutuk*, that these groups were competing with each other and thus complicating political procedures.³⁸⁰ Therefore he had “no choice but interfering” to change the order of things. Kemal’s choice was the establishment of a political group of deputies who were loyal to him. In May 1921, he formed the group and became its leader. The emergence of this organization, which was known as the First Group led to the definite division of the National Assembly in two camps. A smaller number of deputies who, although giving full support to the common cause of the National Assembly, were critical of Mustafa Kemal’s actions, mainly his ever-increasing power at the expense of the assembly became to be known as the Second Group (*İkinci Grup*). Mustafa Kemal, who was the head of administration and the government as the Speaker of the Parliament, became a party leader, as well.

The following months were crucial for the nationalists in Ankara. The invading Greek Army defeated the nationalist army at Kütahya, and Eskişehir, the most significant town which lay between the Greek Army and Ankara, fell into the hands of the Greeks. Anticipating the invasion of the capital, on July 23, 1921, the National Assembly even discussed the relocation of the parliament to the Central-Eastern Anatolian city of Kayseri but a majority of the parliament members refused to retreat.³⁸¹ Instead the parliament decided to send a group of representatives to inspect the battle fronts and give the troops a morale boost. Upon their return to Ankara the members of the inspection group voiced their concerns and suggested the appointment of Mustafa Kemal to the supreme command of the army, to benefit from the leadership skills of Kemal and to boost the morale of the troops.³⁸² Mustafa Kemal who later claimed that this proposal was a devious plan of the opposition members who sought ways to tarnish his reputation by appointing him as the head of an army which at that

³⁸⁰ Atatürk, *Nutuk*, p. 579.

³⁸¹ For these debates see *T.B.M.M. Gizli Celse Zabıtları. Devre 1, Cilt 2*, pp. 98-114.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

that moment seemed to be condemned to lose the battle against the Greek forces,³⁸³ accepted the role on one condition. He wanted to acquire the legislative powers of the parliament throughout the duration of his command. Lively debates followed this announcement. While some deputies initially found this proposal unacceptable, a majority gave their consent.³⁸⁴ With the adoption of this law Mustafa Kemal acquired total control of state affairs; he not only took over the legislative powers of the assembly but also gathered executive power and jurisdiction in his hands through the Independence Courts.

From Mustafa Kemal's standpoint, this was a necessary step to establish a working mechanism for an effective, swift war effort and military victory since he had found some of the parliament members to be totally ignorant, incompetent or over-excited on military issues.³⁸⁵ This law was extended three times for periods of three months before July 10, 1922, when it was extended permanently until the end of the war.³⁸⁶ With this law the authority of the National Assembly which started its life as a legislative and executive body was curbed severely.

While the struggle for the control of the Assembly ended in his favour, Mustafa Kemal's more important struggle continued in the Western front of the Turkish War of Independence. Eventually, the nationalists led by Mustafa Kemal succeeded in repulsing the forces of Greek occupation and altering the Treaty of Sèvres with the superseding Treaty of Lausanne, which was signed on July 24, 1923. From a disastrous war experience, Turkey emerged partially victorious, and managed to restore the lands that had been proposed to be given to Greece, and Armenia, and parts of southern Anatolia, which had been given to France. This achievement gave Mustafa Kemal a tremendous amount of prestige and earned him the respect of the masses. He became the embodiment of the success of the nationalist movement. Kemal used this opportunity which was derived from the devotion of the people and transformed the First Group into the Republican People's Party (RPP). The Second Group members were first marginalized and then eliminated from political life in the September 1923

³⁸³ Atatürk, *Nutuk*, p. 593.

³⁸⁴ The bill was passed with 169 votes, while only 14 deputies refused to hand over the authority of the parliament to Mustafa Kemal. For the debates on the bill see *T.B.M.M. Gizli Celse Zabıtları. Devre 1, Cilt 2*, pp. 164-185.

³⁸⁵ Kinross, *Atatürk*, pp. 356-357.

³⁸⁶ Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, pp. 38-39.

elections. On October 29, 1923, the establishment of the Turkish Republic was officially proclaimed and Mustafa Kemal became the President of the Republic, an office which he would hold until his death in 1938.

According to Rustow, Mustafa Kemal's story until 1923 fits well within the charismatic hypothesis: His personal initiative, narrow escapes, successes, and popular support all fit in the notion of charismatic leadership.³⁸⁷ In the following years, the regime promoted his heroism and his almost supernatural abilities and qualities to manufacture further legitimacy for single-party rule. The success he had in the past, especially his management of the war effort was represented as undeniable proof of the correctness of the vision he had for the future of the country. Between the time passed between the Dardanelles Campaign which earned him his early fame, and the establishment of the Republic in 1923, Mustafa Kemal silenced the opposition both within and outside of the parliament, dissolved the irregular forces, destroyed the burgeoning socialism of Anatolia, and managed to prevent the old Unionist elite from taking over the leadership of the nationalist movement in Anatolia. Furthermore, during the establishment of his cult, this very complex era and the contributions of various elements to the Turkish War of Independence will be simplified as the product of a single mind and vision, namely, as the product of Atatürk. His own narrative of the war effort contributed to this perception. For instance, the very first sentence of the Great Speech, the official historiography of the events, is "On May 19 of 1919, I arrived at Samsun" which spatially and temporally puts himself at the centre and genesis of the nationalist resistance. Furthermore, he stated that the important decisions taken after the war, such as the establishment of the Republic and the abolishment of the Sultanate and Caliphate, were already decided in his mind but he had to implement these policies cautiously because of the "limitations of the minds and souls" of his former comrades-in-arms who were sentenced to remain at the peripheries of the political sphere after his ascendance to the Presidency. A very interesting passage of the Great Speech further illustrates this self-claimed prophetic vision. In this section Kemal claims that he "sensed a great ability for progress in the conscience and in the future of the nation" well before the establishment of the Republic but he had to keep this hidden "like a national secret and enforce it to the

³⁸⁷ Rustow, "Atatürk as Founder of a State.", p. 597.

whole society gradually”.³⁸⁸ This version of events depicts Mustafa Kemal as a visionary with a grand master-plan who had to break loose from the shackles that were holding him and the potential of the nation back. The actions of the single party regime showed that these shackles whether in the form of supporters of other political ideals, old friends who became opposition members, concepts and institutions such as the Sultanate, traditions, contemporary elections, or parliamentary discussions had to disappear so that only Atatürk’s vision would fill the entire social and political spheres.

The Demise of the Opposition and the Domination of the Media

The personality cults of the Turkish presidents relied heavily on their control of the media. In early Republican era a new class of regime-friendly media was created as a control mechanism, and important representatives of these media outlets were integrated into the regime chiefly by being picked as parliament members by the presidents. Along with the official newspaper of the party, *Hakimiyet-i Milliye* (National Sovereignty) (renamed as *Ulus* (Nation) after 1934), several newspapers such as *Cumhuriyet* (The Republic) and *Vakit* (The Times) whose owners or editors of were parliament members acted as mere bulletins of the regime which propagandized Republican ideals and the cult of personalities of presidents Atatürk and İnönü. The rest of the media, which had once thrived both in variety and quantity after the revolution of 1908, were forced into cooperation with the regime, and when they did not accept to stay within the ideological boundaries set by the Republic, they were silenced.

In this era, the most devastating intervention came in the form of the Law on the Maintenance of Order which was declared to suppress the Sheikh Said Revolt in March 1925. The revolt was coincided with the rise of Progressive Republican Party, the first opposition party which managed to challenge the domination of Kemal’s Republican People’s Party. Using the revolt as a pretext, firstly the Progressive Republican Party was banned from political which was followed by the suppression of the free press. Although the 1924 constitution guaranteed the rights of the free press

³⁸⁸ Atatürk, *Nutuk*, p. 16.

and prohibited governmental censorship,³⁸⁹ by citing the superseding Law for the Maintenance of Order, numerous publications from every part of the political spectrum were banned by the government. The Istanbul press, which was seen by the ruling party as a continuation of the anti-nationalist tendencies of the Istanbul government, was especially targeted in the purge. Along with the newspapers supporting the Progressive Republican Party, socialist newspapers and periodicals, and Islamist newspapers which previously criticized the government for the abolition of the caliphate, were also banned and shut down.

The purges continued even after new opposition party was banned from politics. The former leaders and prominent members of the disbanded Progressive Republican Party including decorated war heroes such as Orbay and Karabekir were put on trial in June 1926 on the grounds that they had been connected to an assassination attempt in Izmir which had targeted Mustafa Kemal. The war heroes were released but they remained banned from political life and some of them such as Kâzım Karabekir were put under strict surveillance while other such as Orbay who was abroad during the trials decided to not come back to Turkey until the normalization of the political sphere. In the trials out of the twenty-eight deputies of the PRP, six of them, while still serving as members of parliament, were sentenced to death by the Independence Courts for their role in the assassination attempt, along with nine other people. Additionally, in a separate trial, four former members of the CUP were hanged. In a short time, Mustafa Kemal managed to decimate the entire opposition. The defeat and subsequent tarnishing of the reputations of the old war heroes by associating them with an assassination attempt targeting the President were especially important, since these men, with similar backgrounds and military successes to Atatürk, could have been real contenders in fair and square elections. Furthermore, narrowly escaping an assassination plot added another brick to Atatürk's charisma by making him look undefeatable. Following the attempt on his life Atatürk announced to the press that this attempt was not targeting him but the ideals of the republic and said that his "insignificant body will surely one day turn into dust, but the Republic will live on forever".³⁹⁰ The claim that, along with Atatürk's life, the ideals

³⁸⁹ Article 77 of the constitution of 1924 proclaimed that the "press is free within the frame of the laws and it could not be hold under inspection before publishing."

³⁹⁰ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 259.

of the Republic were under threat would be used throughout the single-party era to justify the authoritarian measures taken by the regime.

After the demise of the PRP, Turkey became an unofficial single-party state until 1930 except the short-lived multi-party experiment of Liberal Republican Party. A second and more devastating blow to the free press came after this unsuccessful attempt at competitive politics in the form of The Press Law of 1931 which restricted the publication business from the political dissidents. With this purge in the media, only the newspapers that enjoyed organic ties with the government and the ruling party managed to continue their existence, a factor which would further expand the reach of the personality cults of the presidents. With the subordination of the media, the closing of the Turkish Hearths in 1931, and the university reform of 1933, which purged the dissidents from the universities, an ideological uniformity was established in the country. From that point on the cult of Atatürk was further solidified by several methods: Public presence which was implemented by the proliferation of Republican imagery and especially monuments and statues modelled after Kemal, and the ideological encirclement of the people through the instrumentality of education, People's Houses, and state-sponsored theories on history and language.

The Cult of Atatürk in Republican Imagery

The steadily increasing visibility of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk was a significant feature of the political religion of the Republican Turkey. Starting from the first statue of him which was built in Sarayburnu (Seraglio Point), Istanbul in October 1926, dozens of memorials were dedicated to him.³⁹¹ It should be noted that the emergence of such a strong tradition in a predominantly Muslim country where due to rigid interpretation of the Quranic prohibition on idolatry,³⁹² sculpture as a form of art did not find any room to thrive, is particularly noteworthy. In the Ottoman Empire, although other forms of visual arts, such as painting which managed to survive either in its Islamicized form of miniature making, or in the form of western painting which started

³⁹¹ For a detailed list of these monuments, see Osma, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Anıt Heykelleri*; and Hüseyin Gezer, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Türk Heykeli* (Ankara: İş Bankası Yayınları, 1984).

³⁹² The Quranic prohibition regarding statues is clearly limited only to idols that people worship. The tradition in the Islamic world that prohibits sculptures of all kinds is hadith-based. See, *The Qur'an* 21: 51-75, Oxford World's Classics Edition.

to develop slowly after the reforms of modernization that started in the early 19th century, sculpture, due to religious stigma associated with it, never found the same chance. Even during the era of transformation, the public monuments built in the Ottoman Empire only came in the form of government buildings, clock towers, mosques and fountains. The first monarch who ordered the construction of a statue of his own was Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876) but this statue was never displayed in public but was rather used decoratively within the boundaries of the palace. The first public monument with a definite political agenda was the Liberty Monument (*Abide-i Hürriyet*) in Şişli, Istanbul, which was constructed to commemorate the soldiers who were killed by the forces of a coup attempt to end the Second Constitutional Era and to reinstate absolute monarchism in 1909, but this monument does not include any forms representing the human body. Therefore one can state that public statues were introduced to Turkey during the early Republican era, specifically in the form of Atatürk statues.³⁹³ The first statue of him at Sarayburnu can also be read as a challenge to the conservative Islamic values which the regime tried to eradicate and replace with the values of Republican political religion.

The debates surrounding the first statue were extremely colourful and show us the importance attributed by the media to the monuments of Atatürk. Well-known figures of the Istanbul press debated vividly where the first monument dedicated to Atatürk should be built and how Atatürk should be depicted. The early debates focused on the location of the monument while different writers tried to detect where the most central place in Istanbul was and where the monument would be most visible to as many people as possible. Avram Galanti,³⁹⁴ writing on June 23, 1925 stated that the location suggested by the officials, Sarayburnu, the promontory on the north-eastern edge of the historical peninsula, was too remote. He wrote that “since he [Atatürk] is an *übermensch*, as well as being a human” the monument should not be located at a remote part of Istanbul, but it should be built in a crowded place instead, such as Eminönü Square, where many more people could see it daily.³⁹⁵ Prominent painter Ali

³⁹³ Kıvanç Osma, "Cumhuriyet'in Anıtları: Anıt Heykeller." Hasan Celal Güzel, Kemal Çiçek & Salim Koca (Eds.), *Türkler, Vol. 18* (Ankara: Yeni Türkiye, 2002), pp. 293-298.

³⁹⁴ Avram Galanti (1873-1961) was an educator, historian, author, and politician. Galanti wrote extensively on Turkish nationality and language. Despite being a Turkish nationalist, he was dismissed from his post at the Istanbul University during the university purges of 1933, presumably on the grounds of his opposing views regarding the alphabet reform of 1928. During the reign of President İnönü, he was rehabilitated and appointed as a parliament member (1943-1946).

³⁹⁵ Avram Galanti, "Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa'nın Heykeli." *Akşam*, 23 June 1925, pp. 367-470.

Sami Boyar, writing on June 26, was not that displeased with Sarayburnu as a location, in fact he seemed to like the idea of a seaside monument which people arriving to Istanbul via sea transport from the Marmara Sea and Bosphorus would be able to see. Boyar voiced a reservation though, he claimed that people from the densely inhabited districts of Beşiktaş and Üsküdar, would not be able to see the monument if it was located in Sarayburnu and suggested that the monument should be built next to the Maiden's Tower (*Kız Kulesi*), the small islet located at the Southern entrance of the Bosphorus.³⁹⁶ Despite all these discussions surrounding the location of the monument, at the end the city council decided to build it at Sarayburnu. The works started in 1925, and this important and historic mission was trusted to the Austrian sculptor Heinrich Krippel.

Another point of discussion regarding the first monument was the depiction of Atatürk. Not just the shape and posture of the statue but the outfit in which he would be depicted as well was debated in the press. Galanti stated that since Atatürk was a polymath, the sculptor could have easily depict him as a soldier in a military uniform, or as a civilian reformer or even as a farmer before coming to the conclusion that the first Atatürk statue must be represented in an officer uniform. Galanti based this argument on the assumption that although the war for independence was over, Atatürk was still in a battle against the “enemies of civilization” and since “the adversaries of civilization only respect strength, and strength could only be depicted with a sword”, the president should be portrayed in military attire. On the other hand Boyar remarked that the stance of statue is more important than the outfit and stated that the monument should look so solemn and aesthetic that even merely its silhouette against the Istanbul night sky should depict Atatürk's historical grandness. Yet when the monument which represented him in civil attire was finished, its posture was almost universally panned. Krippel had depicted Atatürk in motion, his right foot slightly in front of the left one, which looked like he was planning to take a step ahead. Famous poet and author, Ahmet Haşim wrote that this movement of the statue was so distracting it made it impossible for the viewer to focus on Atatürk's face and more importantly the statue looked in mid-step which made him look almost hesitant whereas a monument of a hero “should look like that he can wait patiently throughout eternity”.³⁹⁷ Although the

³⁹⁶ Ali Sami Boyar, "Büyük Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa'nın Heykeli." *Akşam*, 26 June 1925, pp. 371-373.

³⁹⁷ Ahmet Haşim, *Gurabahane-i Laklakan* (Istanbul: YKY, 1928 [2011]), pp. 88-91.

statue did not fully please the important names of the media, a huge crowd gathered on the day of the opening, and following a grandiose ceremony participated by the Mayor of Istanbul, thousands of citizens poured in to see the six-meter tall statue. The masses continued to come and witness this historic moment, the first publically displayed statue of a ruler in a predominantly Islamic country, until the dawn. Following the success of the statue among the citizens of Istanbul, monuments dedicated to Atatürk started to mushroom all across Turkey.

In the same year several local Republican People's Party organizations started to write to the President's Office to gain the privilege of having statues of Atatürk in their hometown. In short time, this new trend became almost a race between local administrations. The representatives of Bursa came to Ankara personally to have a meeting with Atatürk for the possibility of having a statue of him and to ask him to visit Bursa.³⁹⁸ The representatives of Sivas went one step ahead and made the journey to Ankara just to thank Atatürk since he gave them his permission for erecting a statue of him in their hometown.³⁹⁹ In the following years, the construction of the statues became widespread. In late 1926, in the Central Anatolian town of Konya, a six-and-a-half meter tall pedestal which was a part of an unfinished monument from 1910s, was completed by integrating an Atatürk statue on top of it. Similar to the one in Istanbul, this statue was financed by the town municipality as well. This time Atatürk was depicted in his officer uniform.⁴⁰⁰ Between 1929 and 1931 new statues were built in the north-western towns of Edirne, Kırklareli and Tekirdağ.⁴⁰¹ In 1932, Samsun, a city of historical importance for the Republic due to its connection with Atatürk's journey to Anatolia during the Turkish War of Independence, was given a special statue which is called the Statue of Honour (*Onur Anıtı*) and depicted Atatürk in his military uniform and on a reared up war horse. Considering Samsun was the only city which the rival Liberal Republican Party won the local elections in 1930, the construction of this monument by the local Republican People's Party representatives can also be perceived as an act of recapturing a fallen city and baptising it with the

³⁹⁸ BCA: Folder 116, 30..10.0.0/1.1..18./116

³⁹⁹ BCA: Folder 118, 30..10.0.0/1.1..18./118

⁴⁰⁰ Osma, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Anıt Heykelleri*, pp. 34-36.

⁴⁰¹ BCA: File 146, 30..10.0.0/2.1..14./146, BCA: File 139, 30..10.0.0/2.1..14./139, BCA: File 141, 30..10.0.0/1.2..16./141

holiest figure of the regime.⁴⁰² This statue too was made by the Austrian Krippel, who although his work in Istanbul was disliked by the experts, manage to find work in Turkey until 1938.

After the proliferation of the statues all over the country, the government felt the need to control the quality of the work. A commission of nine “experts of international fame” was formed in December 1937 to evaluate the quality of the statues which will be made in the future. This commission had many esteemed Turkish artists of the time such as the sculptor Mehmet Tomruk,⁴⁰³ and famous painter İbrahim Çallı⁴⁰⁴ as well as internationally famed experts, such as French urban planner and architect Henri Prost,⁴⁰⁵ and French designer and architect Louis Süe.⁴⁰⁶ The statues were chiefly built after a tendering process and a competition among the artists. Most of the monuments were constructed by foreign sculptors. Among these, the most prolific sculptor was Krippel. The Austrian artist who worked on the statues in Istanbul and Samsun, built six monuments in Turkey between 1926 and 1938, including the monuments in Konya and Ulus district of Ankara. The monument in Ulus which is called the Victory Monument (*Zafer Anıtı*) was constructed in 1927 and financed privately by parliament member Yunus Nadi’s newspaper⁴⁰⁷ and its readers, which shows us how well the media and the ruling party were integrated to build the cult of personality of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk.

Probably the most famous sculptor who worked in early Republican Turkey was Joseph Thorak who completed the Security Monument (*Emniyet Abidesi*) in Ankara in 1935, and was one of Hitler’s favourite artists and along with Arno Breker

⁴⁰² Most studies on the elections of 1930 and the detailed inspection of the election process conducted by the LRP leader Okyar show that Samsun was the only city which was “officially won” by the party, while the rest of election results which favoured the new opposition party were heavily distorted by the regime to protect the ruling single party. Since a complete data of the results are not available, and the available results were contested by the LRP on the grounds of electoral fraud, it is impossible to determine if Okyar’s claim of a countrywide landslide victory was correct. Similarly to Okyar, LRP member Ahmet Ağaoğlu stated that the most significant reason of the LRP victory in Samsun was the presence of a decent governor who refused to rig the elections in favour of the ruling party and claimed if every governor did act like him, the LRP would easily won three out of every four election districts. See Ağaoğlu, *Serbest Fırka Hatıraları*, p. 88.

⁴⁰³ BCA: No. 8357, 30..18.1.2/82.20..18./8357.

⁴⁰⁴ BCA: File 259, No. 10081, 30..18.1.2/85.106..12.

⁴⁰⁵ BCA: No. 15295, 30..18.1.2/94.16..10.

⁴⁰⁶ BCA: File 159, No. 12523, 30..18.1.2/89.119..3.

⁴⁰⁷ Osma, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Anıt Heykelleri*, pp. 40-45.

the most prolific sculptor of the Nazi era.⁴⁰⁸ In addition to the sculptures in the Security Monument, Thorak also produced several busts of Atatürk including a well-known one located at the gates of the Faculty of Language, History and Geography of the University of Ankara. Despite Thorak's fame, he did not produce as many monuments as Krippel whose productivity was only rivalled by the Italian artist Pietro Canonica. Canonica has built the Monument of the Republic (*Cumhuriyet Anıtı*) in Taksim Square in Istanbul, in 1928, and in addition to two significant monuments in the capital Ankara. The Monument of the Republic is unique because it depicts other important figures from the War of Independence along with Atatürk. Apart from İnönü and Chief of General Staff Fevzi Çakmak, the Soviet allies of the Ankara government namely Mikhail Frunze, the Red Army commander and Minister of Defence who visited Ankara in 1921 and his successor Klim Voroshilov were included in the monument as well, but rather from their inclusion, the exclusion of other notables of the war effort such as Karabekir, Orbay, Cebesoy and Bele who were associated with the opposition against Mustafa Kemal is more significant. Considering the monument was finished after the demise of the Progressive Republican Party in 1925, the purge of the opposition in 1925-1926 and the delivery of the Great Speech in 1927, the monument can be seen as a marble and bronze manifestation of the transformation from a parliamentary regime to the personal rule and as the consolidation of the historical narrative provided by Atatürk. Here, Atatürk's closest ally, his favourite prime minister and future successor İnönü and Çakmak, the loyal chief of the tamed military forces were depicted as standing on both sides of Atatürk, while the decorated military officers of the Progressive Republican Party who were fallen from grace due to the political rift between them and Atatürk, were left out of the monument, echoing their exclusion from the history of the Turkish War of Independence and their expulsion from the political sphere.⁴⁰⁹

Another important monument of Canonica is the equestrian statue of Atatürk which was completed in 1927 and located in front of the Ethnography Museum in

⁴⁰⁸ Joan L. Clinefelter, *Artists for the Reich: Culture and Race from Weimar to Nazi Germany* (New York: Berg, 2005), p. 101.

⁴⁰⁹ Contrary to the deliberate erasure of the dissident generals from the Republican memory, Atatürk's loyal allies; İnönü and Çakmak continued to be included in further monuments. For instance, the reliefs covering the pedestal of the Great Victory Monument in Afyon depicted Atatürk, İnönü and Çakmak as jointly leant over a map, planning the final stage of the Turkish War of Independence.

Ankara. This statue was financed by the Ministry of National Education.⁴¹⁰ Significantly different from the earlier statues, this one had reliefs covering the sides of the pedestal, and representing several moments of Atatürk's life. One of these reliefs depicts a Greek general surrendering to Atatürk by surrendering him his sword while another relief shows Atatürk speaking at the parliament. Another relief on the side depicts several children giving him flowers. A similar pattern can be found among the reliefs on the Atatürk statue in Samsun. In these reliefs Atatürk was shown standing up while surrounded by his people, some of them kneeling in front of him. It seems that by using these reliefs which depicted some of the many roles that Atatürk assumed in the political and social spheres of Turkey, the local Republican People's Party representatives tried to overcome the problems they encountered during the construction of the Sarayburnu monument. This way, Atatürk the teacher of the people, the father figure of the youth, the decorated military officer and civil politician were all portrayed in a single monument which further solidified his unique position as a President with wide ranging authority over many different aspects of politics and social life in Turkey.

Along with the reliefs, another method of propagandizing the importance of Atatürk was the use of inscriptions surrounding the monuments. The first four monuments of Atatürk did not have any inscriptions except Atatürk's name and the year of construction of the monument. Starting from the monument in Ulus, Ankara, which was financed by Yunus Nadi's newspaper, more elaborate inscriptions became visible on the monuments. The monument at Ulus was covered on all sides by several quotes from Mustafa Kemal while the inscription of the monument in the North-Western town of Bursa described Atatürk as "the saviour of the nation, the founder of the Republic, the creator of a new history of the world" and asked the visitors to "bow down in reverence in front of this sacred monument".⁴¹¹ Similarly, the inscription of Great Victory Monument (*Büyük Utku Anıtı*) in Afyon,⁴¹² stated that the monument was dedicated to the "great national hero Atatürk" as a "souvenir of gratitude".

⁴¹⁰ Semavi Eyice, *Atatürk ve Pietro Canonica* (Istanbul: Eren, 1986), p. 9.

⁴¹¹ Osma, *Cumhuriyet Dönemi Anıt Heykelleri*, pp. 58-62.

⁴¹² This statue is not strictly an Atatürk monument because the main element of its composition is a giant of a man representing the Turkish nation towering over his enemy but the pedestal has a large relief depicting Atatürk. See U. Ayla Tekiner, *Atatürk Heykelleri* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2010), p. 142.

Another method for promoting the Atatürk image through these monuments was their imposing public opening ceremonies. Although Atatürk himself never participated in them, each opening ceremony was attended by the high-ranking representatives of the state and the party. Opening ceremonies were either integrated as centrepieces to larger national holidays or became local celebration days of their own.⁴¹³ Typical elements of a Republican opening ceremony are all visible in the ceremony of the Statue of Honour in Samsun. The festivities on January 15, 1932 started with the military marching band playing the national anthem which was followed by the reading of a telegraph of gratitude by Atatürk⁴¹⁴ and a speech of the governor. The proceedings continued with the orations of other local notables including the editor-in-chief of a regional newspaper and director of education of the city. Parades participated by students and guards of honour followed the speeches and the ceremony ended with an official reception at the county council building.⁴¹⁵ This chain of activities that corresponded to a show of strength of the regime with all of its administrative, military, educational and artistic presence, would become a template for all other opening ceremonies. Similarly to the ceremony in Samsun, the Sarayburnu monument in Istanbul and the monuments in Konya and Bursa were all opened by the mayors of the cities while the ceremonies of the monuments in Ankara and in places of particular importance, such as Izmir where the Greek occupation started in May 1919, were always attended by the major actors of the regime. For instance, the equestrian statue in front of the Ethnography Museum was opened by Prime Minister İnönü, while the Speaker of the Parliament and mayor of the city also attended to the ceremony. Similarly, the Atatürk Monument in Izmir which was built by Canonica was opened by İnönü and due to the significance of the city, the opening ceremony almost turned into a nation-wide celebration of a public holiday.

The western-Anatolian city of Izmir was of crucial importance for the Republican regime for several different reasons. Historically, the occupation of the city by the Greek Army constituted the major event that kindled the national resistance

⁴¹³ This practice is inherited from the Second Constitutional Era. The ground-breaking and opening ceremonies of the Liberty Monument in Şişli, Istanbul, were both held on July 23 of 1909 and 1911, respectively. This date was designated as a public holiday which was called *İyd-i Milli* (National Holiday) to commemorate the anniversary of the 1908 Revolution.

⁴¹⁴ Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Tamim, Telgraf ve Beyannameleri*, p. 611.

⁴¹⁵ *Akşam*, January 16, 1932 and M. Fuat Zübeyiroğlu, "Gazi Heykeli'nin Açılma Merasimi: Resmi Küşat Nasıl Oldu ve Söylenen Nutuklar." *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, 26 January 1932, p. 5.

in Anatolia. The emancipation of the city had become a vital goal for the Ankara government and they managed to achieve this goal eventually when the final Turkish offensive drove the Greek Army, along with most of the Christian population inhabiting the city, out of the Izmir on September 9, 1922. Furthermore, Izmir was the second largest city of Republican Turkey after Istanbul which made the construction of a statue there almost mandatory but even more important than these reasons, the recent political events occurred in the city has made a show of strength in Izmir necessary. Izmir was one of the bastions of opposition against the rule of the Republican People's Party.

In 1930, two major events which reinforced the authoritarian attitudes of the regime took place in Izmir and its surrounding region. The first of these incidents was the opposition leader Ali Fethi Okyar's visit to Izmir. After the establishment of Okyar's state-sponsored Liberal Republican Party as an opposition which would remain loyal to the secular and anti-monarchist values⁴¹⁶ of the regime in August 1930, the new party was met with unforeseen enthusiasm from the masses. Opposition members from every colour of the political spectrum, Republican People's Party members who were critical of Prime Minister İnönü, and above all, the impoverished masses who felt the crushing blows of the global economic crisis of 1929 started to pour in. Just a fortnight after the party's establishment, 13,000 people applied to join the LRP. The Aegean region of Turkey and its economic and cultural centre Izmir has quickly become a Liberal stronghold. To consolidate the support of the region, and to answer to a recent speech of İnönü, Okyar decided to visit the region on September 1, 1930. When he and his fellow members arrived to Izmir on September 4 via sea transport, they found the city in a state of unprecedented excitement. According to *Akşam* newspaper around 50,000 people welcomed the opposition leader.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ On August 11, 1930 after inspecting the programme of the new opposition party Atatürk wrote a letter to his friend Okyar which states his happiness regarding the special emphasis put on these two issues by the new party. He wrote: "Once more I have noticed with great pleasure that we share a common ground regarding the principles of secularism and republicanism. After all these two constitute the fundamental principles that I have always pursued and will continue pursuing in politics." To further prove their commitment to the secular ideals, the representatives called the party, Liberal Secular Republican Party (*Serbest Layık Cumhuriyet Fırkası*), in their official writings and documents. Furthermore, the first article of the programme guaranteed the party's devotion to secularism. In the whole programme, words such as "religion" and "belief" were not mentioned at all. Only in the party regulations "freedom of conscience" is mentioned as one of the basic principles of the party. For Atatürk's letter to Okyar, see Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Tamim, Telgraf ve Beyannameleri IV* (Ankara: AAM, 2006), p. 598.

⁴¹⁷ *Aksam*, September 6, 1930.

According to *Cumhuriyet*, “there were men jumping from their boats to the [Okyar’s] vessel to hug him. A lot of them were in tears. When Fethi Bey finally reached to the embankment, thousands rushed to meet him. In this stampede his suit get torn, some people fell to the sea, some get crushed.”⁴¹⁸ The atmosphere became even more intense when the governor of the city tried to prevent Okyar from delivering a speech on the grounds of public security. Upon hearing the news, angry protesters shredded portraits of Atatürk to pieces,⁴¹⁹ and broke the windows of the Republican People’s Party buildings. In retaliation, the police opened fire on them, which resulted in the death of a 12-year old boy. Okyar managed to complete the meeting on September 7. In the local elections that followed the events, the opposition party managed to win forty percent of the votes, despite various threats, and intimidations. This was the largest share of votes of the party received in the three largest cities of Turkey.

The repercussions of the events in Izmir continued to be felt throughout the region despite the demise of the Liberal Republican Party after the elections. The second incident which contributed to the importance of Izmir occurred in Menemen, a district of Izmir province. On December 24, 1930 a mob which were led allegedly by members of the *Nakshbandiyya* Sufi order attempted to incite an Islamic revivalist revolt and killed a young lieutenant and two municipal watchmen. Shocked by the sympathetic attitude of the local folk towards the reactionaries, Atatürk pushed the government to declare martial law in the region. The commission that investigated the incidents claimed that a secret organization including influential *Nakshbandi* leaders, such as Sheikh Mehmed Esad Erbili had been behind these actions, although Tunçay states that the link between the reactionaries and the Sufi order was not very likely to be true. Even further, the government attempted to reveal imaginary links between the reactionaries and Liberal Republican Party, although these attempts failed.⁴²⁰ Eventually, the government rounded up more than 2,000 suspects; many of them were bystanders or citizens who had not been able to find the courage or means to intervene in the incidents. Among the suspects were some former Progressive Republican Party supporters. In total, 29 suspects including Sheikh Erbili’s son, were executed. The

⁴¹⁸ *Cumhuriyet*, September 5, 1930. “İzmir Rihtiminda Tezahurat.”

⁴¹⁹ Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu, *Politikada 45 Yıl* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1984), pp. 117-118.

⁴²⁰ Tunçay, *Türkiye’de Tek Parti*, pp. 303-305.

incidents were used by the regime to prove LRP's link with the reactionaries, thus legitimizing the demise of the opposition party.⁴²¹

Due to Izmir's historical and economic importance and its strong association with the opposition, the opening ceremony of the Izmir Atatürk Monument became an opportunity for the regime to show its strength. The media started to promote the ceremony days before the opening date. According to *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, people lined up along the railway line to greet Prime Minister İnönü on his journey to Izmir. Nearly the entire first page of the following day's issue was allocated to the coverage of the ceremony. Several headlines illustrated how warmly İnönü was received, and how eager the citizens were to hear his speech at the ceremony and to see the Atatürk monument. The ceremony was held on July 27, 1932 and involved Prime Minister İnönü, the Foreign Minister, the governor of the city, ministers of education and public works, parliament members, generals, civilian and military officials, representatives of judiciary, representative from foreign missions of the city, local party members, students⁴²² and according to the reports of *Cumhuriyet* and *Akşam* 50,000 citizens.⁴²³ In his speeches İnönü described the statue as a "sign that will constantly remind the Turkish nation their common great cause" and as the "the embodiment of the will of the Turkish nation in the form of an unyielding iron grasp." This speech demonstrates one of the main motivations of the regime's determination of erecting Atatürk monuments. They were there to remind the people of their leader, the party, and the "cause" determined by them without any active contribution from the people. The monuments were a type of medium, an agent of communication which only worked one-way. In an authoritarian regime without any agencies of their own and without any social organizations or political parties, the people were forced to accept the vision of the leader that was constantly reinforced through the Republican imagery. The lavish opening ceremonies accompanying the monuments were more than being an instrument of indoctrination, they were staged to create awe among the citizens for the

⁴²¹ In some Republican People's Party sources, the Menemen incident is cited as the reason for the closing of the Liberal Republican Party although the incident occurred after the dissolving of the party. For instance, the RPP propaganda material celebrating the 40th anniversary of the party states that "the perpetrators of these incidents were encouraged by the negative aura caused by the Liberal Republican Party". See *Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi* (Ed.), *CHP – Millet Hizmetinde 40 Yıl* (Ankara: Ankara, 1963), pp. 30-35.

⁴²² *Akşam*, July 26, 1932.

⁴²³ "Gazi Heykeli Açıldı ve İsmet Paşa 50.000 Kişi Huzurunda Nutkunu Söyledi." *Cumhuriyet*, July 28, 1932.

strength of the regime, and to show that their subaltern status is something to be celebrated, not to be fought against. Fittingly to these aims, the following celebrations were so lively they were described by *Akşam* as being on a par with the celebrations that occurred during the city's emancipation from the Greek occupation.⁴²⁴

In the Republican monuments the figure of Six Arrows, the official symbol of the party was widely used. Examining the photos of the opening ceremonies of the monument, the flags carrying this emblem are visible nearly as much as the flag of Turkey. The Six Arrow emblem was created in 1933 by Ismail Hakki Tonguç, a graphic artist and educator who would later become the General Director of Primary Education. The emblem depicts six white arrows, representing the six basic principles of the party, on a red background. The shapes of the arrows were determined by Tonguç after carefully examining the traditional Turkish arrows gathered from the Topkapı Palace.⁴²⁵ White arrows, closely resembling ray of lights, were symbolized the continuous forward motion undertaken by the party. The Six Arrows motif in Atatürk monuments is visible in the monument of Adana, which was constructed in 1935. Here, Atatürk was depicted in military attire and located in the centre of this rather large composition of monuments on a pedestal while three figures circled around him. One of them, a healthy young man is depicted as holding the Six Arrows in the air. This figure, which unifies President Atatürk and his party in one monument, marks a crucial moment in the single-party history, namely, the party-state merger of 1935. The merger, the zenith of the authoritarian tendencies of the early Republican era, dictated that the positions held by party officials would be taken over by corresponding representatives of the state. With this move the boundaries between the ruling party and the state, which had been already blurry, were totally removed and even the limited political plurality that had existed in local branches was sacrificed for total uniformity. The Republican imagery marked this crucial moment of history through representing it in the medium of art.

In summary, the monuments of Atatürk, and the party regalia were utilized by the regime for a plethora of reasons that were interconnected with each other in the larger framework of building and later consolidating an authoritarian political religion which would replace the values, beliefs, ideologies and various senses of

⁴²⁴ *Akşam*, July 28, 1932.

⁴²⁵ *Cumhuriyet*, October 19, 1933.

belongingness that were present in the post-Ottoman Turkish society. The monuments challenged the centuries-old Islamic norm of non-depiction of the human form in sculpture and thus served the modernist approach of the regime. Constructing monuments in cities where the opposition was strong gave the regime a chance to show its strength and regain its authority. The composition of the monuments consolidated the historical narrative determined by Atatürk by excluding the important actors of the War of Independence who became opposition members while depicting the loyal friends of Atatürk next to him in the monuments and legitimized the expulsion of the opposition members from the political sphere. Furthermore, the statues of Atatürk along with their reliefs and inscriptions and the lavish opening ceremonies accompanying them were perfect tools of propaganda for the regime. More importantly, the monuments helped immensely the establishment and consolidation of the cult of Atatürk by depicting him as the only legitimate hero, leader, and saviour of the people with almost supernatural abilities. This sacralisation of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk is not just restricted to his constant presence in public places. The media which was controlled by the regime contributed to this process as well.

For a citizen of Turkey, Atatürk's presence in the early Republican media must have been impossible to ignore. He was constantly visible, and the respect and gratitude shown to him was bordering on glorification. He was called the Greatest Turk,⁴²⁶ the Great Turkish Genius,⁴²⁷ the Great *Ghazi*,⁴²⁸ the Founder,⁴²⁹ the Great Guide of the nation, the Great Educator⁴³⁰ and the Great Emancipator⁴³¹ among as many other honorary titles. He was regularly compared to other leaders, military figures, eminent scientists and famous artists from history, and most of the time, he prevailed over them. *Türk Yurdu* magazine for instance described him as the "greatest genius and revolutionary ever produced for all centuries".⁴³² Similarly Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, one of the most prominent ideologues of the party compared him to famous historical figures and claimed he was a greater leader than Julius Caesar, Hannibal,

⁴²⁶ *En Büyük Türk* (Afet İnan, "Türk-Osmanlı Tarihinin Karakteristik Noktalarına Bir Bakış." *Belleten*, Vol. II, No. 5-6 (April 1938), pp. 123-132.

⁴²⁷ *Büyük Türk Dahisi* ("Yeni Harflerimiz ve Türk Ocakları." *Türk Yurdu* (August 1928), p. 45.)

⁴²⁸ *Büyük Gazi*

⁴²⁹ *Bani*.

⁴³⁰ *Büyük Mürşid, Büyük Mürebbi* – ("Dünkü Bayram Merasimi Karşısında." *Hakimiyet-i Milliye*, September 30, 1925.)

⁴³¹ *Büyük Munci*.

⁴³² "Reis-i Cumhur Hazretlerinin Seyahatleri." *Türk Yurdu* (September 1928), p. 39.

Napoleon Bonaparte, George Washington, Peter the Great and Alexander the Great. After this claim Bozkurt moved to comparing Atatürk's importance to his contemporary world leaders and passionately claimed how much Atatürk had influenced them. Bozkurt stated that, "Mussolini admired Atatürk very much. Similarly Hitler always made remarks about how he took Atatürk as an example. A contemporary German historian observed that both National Socialism and Fascism were nothing but modified versions of Mustafa Kemal's regime. This assumption was profoundly true".⁴³³ Of course, when he uttered these words in 1938, these two leaders were still relatively respected figures, and had sympathizers in almost every country, even in the most stable Western democracies.⁴³⁴

Another example of glorifying Atatürk by comparing him with the greatest minds of humanity, can be found in the works of the author Raif Necdet Kestelli. He stated that Atatürk is a far superior leader than Napoleon and his greatness knows no boundaries. According to Kestelli, Atatürk was a polymath. He continued, "Atatürk is a great scientist, an eminent artist, a world-wide known Turkish genius on the same level as Pasteur, Edison, Shakespeare or Beethoven."⁴³⁵ These quotes, which can easily be multiplied, reflect the prevailing sentiments among Republican media. Some of the qualities of Atatürk constantly praised by media were attributed to his unique genius while the rest were seen as a part of his hard work and dedication. He was pictured as a dedicated leader who worked ceaselessly to reach his goals. *Türk Yurdu* supported this image by claiming that Atatürk used to work "forty, fifty hours without sleeping and resting" for his country.

Atatürk was the personification of the regime. His successor İnönü once stated that "understanding and loving the Turkish revolution, and serving to the success of the Turkish revolution cannot be separated from understanding and loving the great

⁴³³ Bozkurt, *Atatürk İhtilali*, pp. 69-75. On the other hand, according to Plaggenborg and Ahmad, in 1950s, some Italian social scientists would claim that the Republican regime was an "imitation" of Fascist Italy. See Plaggenborg, p. 45., and Ahmad, p. 65.

⁴³⁴ According to most sources, Atatürk despised his contemporary authoritarian leaders; especially Mussolini and Hitler. Kinross informs us that Atatürk had read *Mein Kampf* and said that "Hitler's untamed language and insane thoughts made him feel sick to his stomach." For more information, see Kinross, *Atatürk*, p. 535. On the other hand, some recent publications support Bozkurt's claim and suggest that Hitler and other major Nazi figures admired Atatürk. For more information, see Stefan Ihrig, *Atatürk in the Nazi Imagination* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2014).

⁴³⁵ Raif Necdet Kestelli, "Büyük Adam." Mehmet Kaplan, İnci Enginün, Zeynep Kerman, Necat Birinci & Abdullah Uçman (Eds.) *Atatürk Devri Fikir Hayatı I* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1981), pp. 88-90.

chief Mustafa Kemal and sincerely trying to apply his ideals. These notions are inseparable from each other.” With this speech, İnönü declared that Atatürk was the embodiment of the Republic and republican ideals.⁴³⁶ He was seen as the quintessence and the soul of Turkey. İzzet Ulvi Aykurt, a parliament member, stated right after the alphabet reform of 1928 that Kemal was the embodiment of the “spirit of revolution,” a concept which according to him was responsible for the progress of a society. Aykurt continued to describe Kemal as “a genius who had found the ability of keeping the spirit of revolution alive in his very own soul” and “our saviour, the genius of our own age, is one of those wondrous beings rarely produced by centuries”.⁴³⁷ These examples speak volumes of the level of admiration shown for Atatürk. If we return to Gentile’s definition of political religions being “new churches devoted to propagandizing faith in absolute and unquestionable ideological truths, persecuting the unfaithful and worshipping sacralised human entities”, we can conclude that among other secular entities that sacralised, such as the party, the state and the history of the War of Independence, the most intense and successful process of sacralisation has been the one focusing on Atatürk. Therefore his death in 1938 could have destroyed the Republican regime, but the Republican elite managed to project Atatürk’s charisma to his successor İnönü, and managed to survive.

The Transition to İnönü Era

As seen in the previous parts of this chapter, Atatürk played several roles within the Republican regime. He was a politician, a reformer and an educator. The monuments depicted him as a war hero and a successful military officer. Following the Republican reforms, he was started to be known as the “Head Teacher”, as well. Prime Minister İnönü also emphasized the role of Atatürk as an educator and stated that “today every corner of our country is a classroom, and the head teacher is the *Ghazi*, the main treasure and the greatest son of this nation”.⁴³⁸ These roles of Atatürk further cement the cult of personalities of the Republican leaders who filled various unconventional “functions” throughout the single-party era that cannot be associated with conventional political regimes. Atatürk was the self-appointed educator, the leader

⁴³⁶ İsmet İnönü, *Ülkü – Halkevleri Mecmuası*, Vol. 3, No. 14. (April 1934), pp. 81-87.

⁴³⁷ İzzet Ulvi Aykurt, “Yeni Türk Harfleri Münasebetiyle.” *Türk Yurdu* (June 1928), pp. 1-3.

⁴³⁸ “İsmet Paşa Hazretlerinin Nutukları.” *Türk Yurdu* (September 1928), pp. 40-41

who was blessed with a special vision and the saviour of the people but above all, he was a father figure of the nation.

For Leon and Langenbacher, in political religions the charismatic leader “becomes the quasi-religious father of the country”.⁴³⁹ Indeed, in Turkey, the leader became a father figure for the country; he was even called as Atatürk which means “the father of the Turks” or just as “*Ata*” in short form, which means “father”. Arsal summarizes the importance of Atatürk as the central figure for Turkish society with these words: “According to the ideology of the Turkish revolution the shortest definition of the state is a nation which gathers around his father (Atatürk).”⁴⁴⁰ After his death in November 10, 1938, the unusual connection he had with the people that had been carefully constructed on the basis of his successes during the War of Independence and consolidated through various forms of one-way communication such as elections, Atatürk monuments, and media, created a crucial problem for his successor İnönü. Upon coming to office and taking over the wide-ranging responsibilities of Atatürk with the official title of *Milli Şef* (The National Chief), he had to build similarly close relations with the citizens to fill the void left by the demise of Atatürk.

This was not an easy task. First, the personalities of the two leaders were very different from each other. While Atatürk was mercurial and unpredictable, İnönü was more restrained, and careful. Politically, İnönü took all the necessary steps; he decided to expand the base that supported him and therefore rehabilitated political dissidents. Kâzım Karabekir, Rauf Orbay and Adnan Adıvar returned to politics after thirteen years’ exclusion although Karabekir remained under surveillance.⁴⁴¹ This was a crack in the face of the regime that made the second phase of the Turkish authoritarianism more pluralistic than its first phase. Similarly, İnönü followed a cautious approach in international politics, and pursued a policy of neutrality during the Second World War. Internally, for the legitimation of the regime, the political religion continued to exist, and Atatürk, although dead, remained its central figure.

It is debatable whether İnönü tried to emulate Atatürk’s role as the central figure of Republican political religion. İnönü did not openly imitate or challenge

⁴³⁹ Leon and Langenbacher, “Is Castroism a Political Religion?”, p. 57.

⁴⁴⁰ Arsal, 1937.

⁴⁴¹ BCA: 121..10.0.0/ 2.7..1./122522-1 and BCA: 121..10.0.0/ 2.8..1./122522-2.

Atatürk, even when he changed some aspects of his regime. His method was mostly reflecting, transferring the charisma of Atatürk to himself by pointing out their shared past. In fact, they were extremely close to each other since the days of the War of Independence. Atatürk trusted him enough to make him the commander of the Western front of the war, later to send him to Lausanne Conference to discuss the peace conditions and eventually, to appoint him as Prime Minister on three separate occasions for a total tenure of almost fourteen years. This story fits well to the description of manufactured charisma by Glassman. According to Glassman, though technically charisma should not be transferable, “in practice, close association with the charismatic leader often confers charisma onto others. At the death of a charismatic leader the group will often turn for leadership to one of the individuals closely associated with the charismatic leader. In this sense charisma is transferable and it is often the case that those close to a charismatic leader can succeed that leader.” This is exactly what happened in Republican Turkey. İnönü did not dismantle Atatürk’s place as the central figure of the state. He has built himself a place alongside it.

Regarding their public presence, although Atatürk was dead he was still more visible than his successor. During İnönü’s reign, there were only three attempts to make İnönü monuments. In 1939, it was suggested to build a İnönü monument at Metristepe, Bozüyük, where İnönü led the troops of the nationalist government at the Battle of İnönü but this project was quickly shelved.⁴⁴² In 1940, it was decided to add an equestrian İnönü monument in Taksim Square, Istanbul, next to the Republic Monument. The statue was finished in 1944, but was never erected in Taksim Square as planned, presumably due to İnönü’s avoidance from being perceived by the people as trying to challenge Atatürk’s importance. The monument waited for years to find a suitable place, and after the transition to multi-party regime, it was locked away. Years later, in 1982, it was moved to a small park in Maçka, Istanbul.⁴⁴³ Of the three attempts to erect an İnönü monument, the only successful one was the monument which depicted İnönü in civilian clothing and was located not in a crowded public place but at the gates of the Faculty of Agriculture in Ankara, which further proves İnönü’s reluctance to overshadow Atatürk, especially considering that unlike İnönü monuments, the construction of Atatürk monuments continued during this period.

⁴⁴² BCA: File 236, 30..10.0.0/ 1.8...2./236.

⁴⁴³ Osma, “Cumhuriyet’in Anıtları: Anıt Heykeller.”, pp. 293-298.

Another example which shows that İnönü did not want to challenge Atatürk's central role in the political religion but rather to use it to consolidate and legitimise his own position is visible in the debates surrounding the regulations of 1941 on how public offices should display the portraits of the eternal and national chiefs. The documents of the debates that came to my attention among the documents at the Prime Ministerial Archives also constitute a rich example of how the two leaders were incorporated in Republican rituals and of how bureaucratic processes work in authoritarian states. The story begins in 1941, when Dr. Rıza Levent, the Chief Inspector of Aydın region in western Turkey was apparently worried about the lack of protocol and order on how public offices should display the portraits of the party chiefs. In some offices there were only portraits of Atatürk while some others had the portraits of both leaders. Furthermore, there was no uniformity regarding the size of the portraits, the way the leaders were depicted or their location in the public offices. In a note he sent to the office of the secretary-general of the party, Dr. Rıza asked if there was a rule on which portraits of which leaders will go where in public offices, schools and other governmental agencies.⁴⁴⁴

Secretary-General Ahmet Fikri Tüzer's answer was negative, there were no regulations regarding this issue. Tüzer, who started to obsess about the issue, sent messages to every Turkish foreign representative, ordering them to make enquiries to find whether any regulations on displaying portraits existed in foreign countries. Furthermore, he established a commission from the members of the Ministry of State and the Ministry of Education to solve this conundrum. Despite their hard work, the commission could not find a universally accepted set of rules for portrait hanging. The Minister of Education, Hasan Âli Yücel, summarized the findings of the commission and stated that every country has its own set of rules on this matter. Prime Minister Refik Saydam examined the report and came to the conclusion that although there were many different regulations on exhibiting portraits of leaders in foreign countries, in Turkey "displaying the portraits of our chiefs in a random manner may cause a deficiency of the respect that everyone is obligated to show" and therefore "there should be a uniform application in every office".⁴⁴⁵ This was followed by the ratification of a set of regulations. According to the new regulations, current chief

⁴⁴⁴ BCA: File 242, 30..10.0.0/ 1.8...8.

⁴⁴⁵ BCA: File A7, 30..10.0.0/ 17.96...18.

İnönü's portrait should hang right behind the chair of the public office holder (above shoulder height) and eternal chief Atatürk's portrait should hang on the opposite wall, directly facing the portrait of İnönü. In offices where this setup was not physically applicable both portraits should hang next to each other, behind the chair of the public office holder. On these occasions İnönü would be on the right side while Atatürk would be on the left.

More interestingly, the remaining documents show that these regulations were changed in 1944 on İnönü's order and the places of the two portraits were switched. İnönü stated that this change was "a manifestation of our eternal gratitude and gratefulness we have for Atatürk" which show us that the earlier setup must have been criticized by citizens or other party members because it was perceived as being disrespectful to the eternal leader Atatürk.⁴⁴⁶ İnönü, who presented himself as the rightful heir of Atatürk and carefully tried to reflect the charisma of Atatürk onto himself, to obtain legitimacy, must have thought that the position of the portrait that was hung on the wall behind the chair of the public office holder was associated more with the authority of the state, and that it was best to leave that position to the real source of authority: Atatürk.⁴⁴⁷

Interestingly, the position of the portraits of the two presidents resembles a similar design. After the funeral ceremony of Atatürk was held at Dolmabahçe Palace, his body was brought back to Ankara and was located at the Ethnography Museum which was a temporal resting place. Three years later an architectural competition for the construction of the final resting place of Atatürk was held. In 1944, the building of this tomb began but due to budgetary restrictions the construction was only finished in 1953, fifteen year after Atatürk's demise. This monumental tomb, "*Anıtkabir*" (Monument-Tomb) was located in central Ankara, on a hill dominating the city. Since its completion, this massive building has become a focal point of official and civilian remembrances of Atatürk. In the opposite direction, facing this 56 ft. tall, 188 ft. long gigantic building, there is the rather humble tomb of President İnönü. Even in his death, he remained in the shadow of his predecessor.

⁴⁴⁶ BCA 490..0.1.0/ 230.909...1.

⁴⁴⁷ After the transition to the multi-party democracy in 1950, the Democrat Party government took down the İnönü portraits, and left the Atatürk portraits in their places. The need for showing respect to the source of 'real authority' in the country must have played a role in this decision.

An Assessment of the Turkish Political Religion

In this chapter, I have looked to the single-party years of the Turkish Republic through the lense of political religions. Here I have used political religions as a heuristic device, to learn more in-depth about the authoritarian tendencies of the regime. I specifically examined the amount of tolerance shown to other ideologies, identities and beliefs, the freedom of the individuals, the utilization of the methods of communication by the regime, and the importance attributed to the leader cult.

According to the simplest definition of the concept, political religions are political systems which resemble the organized religions. Like religions, they propagandize faith in absolute and unquestionable ideological truths, persecute the unfaithful and almost worship sacralised human entities. Political religions are established through “merging of the religious and political dimensions”, a process defined by Gentile as the sacralisation of the secular, where the regime takes over the features of a religion.⁴⁴⁸ Although even in the most democratic regimes, a certain level of sacredness could be attributed to a secular entity, concept, or even to a person, a crucial difference of the political religions is that they are not willing to co-exist with other identities; instead they seek ways to replace them. In political religions, the state, as the only legal and rightful entity fills the political and social spheres. Finally, to legitimize themselves and to survive, they promote a Manichean world-view which means that they claim that there is an almost cosmological battle between the forces of the light, represented by the regime itself, and the forces of the dark; its political enemies.

It is more than fair to say that the political system of the single-party years resemble organized religions. The single-party regime of Turkey prohibited competitive politics after 1925 until the transition to multi-party regime in 1945, except a three-month long multi-party experience in 1930. Similarly to the political sphere, the social life as well was regulated by the party while all voluntary social organizations, from traditional Sufi orders that dominated the social life in rural areas, to the fledgling class-based social movements in the cities, were prohibited. No tolerance was shown to other beliefs, ideologies and identities. This left the party and its ideology alone in the political and social spheres. Furthermore the ideology of the

⁴⁴⁸ Gentile, *Politics as Religion*, p. 45.

party was turned into a code, “The Six Arrows”, and then integrated as the unalterable principles of the state to the constitution. This act made all other ideologies and beliefs that oppose the ideology of the ruling party, illegal. The regime had in its armoury a plethora of instruments to disseminate its modernist Republican ideology to masses, ranging from the education system to the large network of public monuments. Without a source of force of resistance in the country, especially after 1931, the regime surrounded the citizens with its ideological weapons, Republican imagery, the education system, grand theories of language and history, and media. The ideological truths of the party became unquestionable, and therefore crossed the line between the sacred and profane. The ideology of the regime became a religion.

As for the sacralisation of the secular entities, the Turkish case is a textbook example. For Linz, the sacralisation process in political religions includes attributing sacredness to secular “persons, places, symbols, dates, and the elaboration of rituals connected with them.” In Republican Turkey, each of these elements attributed to Atatürk were sacralised. The day of his arrival to Anatolia during the national struggle became a public holiday, while the date of his death was declared as a day of national mourning. Religious imagery was constantly used in Republican depictions of Atatürk. He was not just presented as a hero, but also as a prophet, a holy being, or, in some cases, even as a god. İbrahim Alaettin Gövsa depicted his meetings with Atatürk as a form of contact with an otherworldly being. He stated: “Our Great *Ghazi* has a very powerful personality. One who comes to contact with him gains a power of belief which would suffice to bring light to the darkness, a light which is powerful as a piece of the sun itself”.⁴⁴⁹ Another significant description of Atatürk with strong religious connotations can be found in Avram Galanti’s writings. Galanti stated that Chapter 61, Verse 1 of the Book of Isaiah in the Bible “could be wholly applied for Atatürk’s great personality”. The verse is: “because the Lord has anointed me, to proclaim good news to the poor, He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives, and release from darkness for the prisoners, to comfort all who mourn”.⁴⁵⁰ Lastly, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu took a step further when he described in his memoirs the moment he met with Mustafa Kemal as follows: “*Ghazi* was standing motionless like a statue, like a work of art made out of bronze. It was a terrifying sight. I am telling

⁴⁴⁹ Hıfzırrahman Raşit Öymen, “Cumhuriyet Eğitime Geçişte Atatürk’ün Etkisi.” Türk Tarih Kurumu (Ed.) *Atatürk Konferansları, 1973-1974* (Ankara: TTK Yayınları, 1977), p. 194.

⁴⁵⁰ Galanti, “Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa’nın Heykeli.”

this with all of my sincerity, I was feeling the ecstasy and awe of a believer who appears before its maker in a most glorious temple”.⁴⁵¹ This sacralisation of Atatürk was thorough and complete, it is difficult to find a more suitable example to Maritain’s concept of “idols turning into gods” than the deification of Mustafa Kemal.

In Republican single-party rule, while the leaders were sacralised as heroes, their political enemies were persecuted or relegated to obscurity. The generals who started the Turkish War of Independence with Atatürk were excluded from politics. The newspapers that supported other political agendas were either closed or tamed. All of these qualities make the regime resemble organized religions. Historians who examine this period of Turkish history came to similar conclusions. For instance, according to Tunçay, prominent members of the Republican People’s Party, most importantly Atatürk, became a demigod while other party chiefs were considered like the gods of Olympus for the urbanized Turks. Similarly, Zürcher stated that for some “Kemalism was known as the Turkish religion.”⁴⁵²

On the other hand, whether all aspects of Turkish authoritarianism qualify for being a political religion is debatable. Stanley Payne lists some of the religious characteristics adopted by political religions as: development of a salvation myth, creation of elaborate ceremonies and liturgies; canonisation of saints and martyrs; the development of a cultural and spiritual revolution to create a new man; the projection of messianic and Universalist goals.⁴⁵³ Among these, the lack of Universalist goals stands out as the most problematic one. Although having an inalterable set of principles with the Six Arrows, the ideological aim of Turkish authoritarianism was limited to the boundaries of Turkey. It was intending for a total revolution in Turkey but its staunch nationalism prevented the possibility of planning to export this revolution around the globe, though some intellectuals in “*Kadro*”⁴⁵⁴ periodical tried to create a Universalist project out of Turkish authoritarianism. *Kadro* claimed that the system in Turkey was unique, and it was a third-way between liberalism and socialism, a new phase of development beyond these ideologies and they defined it as

⁴⁵¹ Öymen, “Cumhuriyet Eğitimine Geçişte Atatürk’ün Etkisi.”, p. 176.

⁴⁵² Zürcher, *Turkey – A Modern History*, p. 270.

⁴⁵³ Payne, “The Concept of Political Religion.”, pp. 163-174.

⁴⁵⁴ *Kadro* was published between 1932 and 1935 by Şevket Süreyya Aydemir, Vedat Nedim Tör, Burhan Asaf Belge, and İsmail Hüsrev Tökin. Most of these names were ex-socialists who were influenced by the early anti-imperialist rhetoric of Mustafa Kemal. *Kadro* was supported by the famous author Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu and İsmet İnönü, who also contributed articles to the publication.

the “National Liberation State”. According to the members of the periodical, this supposedly anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist and statist policies of the Republican Turkey could offer a solution to the underdeveloped world.⁴⁵⁵ Although İnönü, supported and even contributed some articles to the magazine, the impact of the publication has been minimal. Apart from the lack of a Universalist goal, the single party-regime in Turkey fulfils all other prerequisites of Payne’s matrix to be qualified as a political religion.

Lastly, the data collected for this chapter from the primary and secondary sources, especially the intellectual output generated by the members of regime-friendly media demonstrate that in single-party Turkey, the political religion was established and survived mainly due to two interconnected reasons. Firstly, the system was designed to maximize the duration and the authority of the personal rule of Atatürk. The demise of the opposition, the domination of the media, and the establishment of the personal cult of Atatürk, in fact the entire political religion were instruments to keep the Republican leaders at power as long as possible. In connection with this personal rule, the ideology of Atatürk also played a significant role in the establishment of the Turkish political religion. As the previous chapter displayed, Atatürk and the Republican elite sincerely believed that the Turkish society needed a total transformation and the only way for Turkey to continue its existence was modernizing as fast as possible which was only conceivable through total control of the political, social and cultural spheres. Therefore the regime removed all the obstacles that stood in the way of this modernizing reforms through the instrumentality of a political religion based on the cult of Atatürk. The most significant obstacles were perceived as the values and traditions emanated from the Islamicate past, which the regime associated with the ‘darkness of the middle ages’. Some of the most drastic acts of the era, such as the reforms in the fields of language and religion were aimed to cut off the cultural and historical ties of the nation with the Islamicate culture and the other remnants of the imperial, multi-national past. Some other acts, such as the

⁴⁵⁵ The anti-developmental approach of *Kadro* closely resembles Third-Worldism. According to *Kadro* member Tör, *Kadro* heralded the notion of the Third-World while Emre Kongar states that *Kadro* also laid the foundation for the “Centre-Periphery” theory. For more information on *Kadro*, see İlhan Tekeli & Selim İlkin, *Bir Cumhuriyet Öyküsü, Kadrocuları ve Kadro’yu Anlamak* (İstanbul: Tarih Vakfı, 2003).

monument building project of 1930s contributed to both of these motivations simultaneously.

Although most modernizing reforms that accompanied the establishment of the political religion; especially reforms on education and women rights helped to change the face of the country for good, two major problems were inherited from this era that would haunt the Turkish politics and social life for decades. Firstly, the political religion created a very elaborate and powerful cult of personality which still exists in Turkey. Furthermore the existence of this cult, made further cults possible, since the society became accustomed to having a fatherlike, all powerful figure as a leader of the country. Many politicians, including the incumbent president of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan successfully exploited this psychological conditioning of the Turkish people to increase their controls over them. Secondly, the reforms emanated from the Republican political religion created a Turkey which is in war with its own past, culture and memories that created deep political and social cleavages within the society, especially by alienating the more religious and conservative elements of the national community. The effects of these reforms will be discussed in the following chapter in detail.

Chapter 4

The Quest for Modernity and the Liquidation of Dersim

We've had enough of living like Orientals in the West ... Free us from this dark dungeon.⁴⁵⁶

- Ziya Gökalp, "*Petition to Ghazî*", 1922

On June 1, 1936, Sabiha Gökçen, one of Atatürk's adopted daughters,⁴⁵⁷ completed her first flight as an airplane pilot. She had been training for this moment for over a year as a member of the "*Türkkuşu*" (Turkish Bird) initiative set up by Atatürk to train young civilian aviators. Her flying lessons started with controlling a glider, which proved rather difficult for Gökçen, a slender, twenty-two year old girl whose small frame was not heavy enough to balance the glider, therefore several sandbags were installed to the aircraft to provide the needed extra weight. After these alterations Gökçen managed to control the light aircraft and later continued her education by piloting heavier gliders and using the parachute under the guidance of the Soviet aviation experts. Following the success of her first airplane flight, she gave a brief interview to the *Cumhuriyet* newspaper, in which she stated: "I do not know how successful I am going to be, but I am wholly committed to flying".⁴⁵⁸ Her career proved to be successful indeed. Gökçen continued the flying lessons and later in Soviet Russia, she participated in several aviation competitions and war games, becoming one of the first female fighter pilots in the world. Her personal story is firmly connected to the modernization project envisaged by his father, because only a year after from her first flight, Gökçen was piloting one of the aircrafts which dropped bombs on the Eastern Anatolian town of Dersim as a part of the military campaign which devastated the region and cost thousands of lives.

⁴⁵⁶ Ziya Gökalp, "Gazi'ye İstidâ." *Küçük Mecmua*, No. 29 (1922).

⁴⁵⁷ Atatürk remained married only for a short period of time and did not have any children with his wife. Instead, he took the responsibility of several parentless, promising children by adopting them. He fostered at least nine children, made sure that they got the best education possible and showed close interest in their career paths. Atatürk adopted Gökçen when the parentless girl was twelve, and after hearing Gökçen's fascination with aviation which started following their attendance at an air show of Soviet aviators, Atatürk mapped out her career as a pilot. For more information on her, see her memoir; Sabiha Gökçen, *Atatürk'le Bir Ömür* (Istanbul: Altın Kitap, 2006) and Ayşe Gül Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 33-58.

⁴⁵⁸ V. Birsen, "Turk Kadını Havacılıkta da Harika Yapacak." *Cumhuriyet*, June 2, 1936, p. 5.

Dersim was a geographically isolated area. Being surrounded by high mountains the region was also cut off from the dominant Sunni Muslim culture of Eastern Anatolia. This isolation led to the establishment of a uniquely syncretistic religious belief system, as well as to the emergence of a tribal social order based on the religious-secular authority of the tribe leaders. Due to harsh living conditions within Dersim and the lack of central governmental control in the area, the Dersimi tribes were also armed, and were in a constant struggle, internally with each other, and externally with the surrounding regions which were dominated by Sunni Muslims. After the establishment of the Republic, several plans were prepared to prevent the public order problems created by the Dersimi tribes, and to implement state authority over the region. On paper, the plans included a military campaign which would specifically target the tribe leaders and notables, and several construction projects that would change the social structure in the region for good. The reality proved to be much bleaker than the promises; the military campaign caused the demise of 13,806 residents of Dersim.⁴⁵⁹ Considering the population of the region was estimated around 65,000 in 1935,⁴⁶⁰ one can observe that almost 1/5 of the Dersimi people were killed during the campaign. Furthermore, many others were forcibly removed from their lands and sent away to other parts of the country and to dishearten them from returning, many villages, houses, and farms were burned to the ground.

The Republican regime presented the campaign targeting Dersim as a modernizing crusade against the local elements who were perceived by the regime as actively resisting the modernization attempts of the government. This attitude of the government is evident in the documents available in the archives, the reports of the regime-friendly media and the statements of the party leaders. For instance, the Prime Minister of the era İsmet İnönü stated in the Grand Assembly that the military campaign that continued from April 1937 to November 1938 was waged to “open up the region to civilization”.⁴⁶¹ The reality was much more complicated and multi-

⁴⁵⁹ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.751...30.

⁴⁶⁰ Since Dersim did not have the city status before 1935, and its districts were distributed among the neighbouring towns, it is hard to determine the exact population of the area effected by the military campaign of 1937-1938. The estimation of 65,000 is first quoted by the Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya on December 25, 1935, at the Grand Assembly. Considering that the Minister had access to the numbers from the recent population census of 1935, this estimation stands out as the most accurate one. For Kaya's estimation, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 7, p. 175.

⁴⁶¹ Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's speech at the Grand Assembly, June 14, 1937. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 19, p. 315.

layered than this, but modernity, the leitmotif of most of the Republican tenets and practices, still remained visible in the actions taken in Dersim. The damage inflicted on the people and the land was almost celebrated as a victory against the resistance which was shown by the “archaic forces of the past” against the “modern forces” represented by the Turkish Republic. From the official point of view, the single-party insisted that to replace this archaic system with modernity, a fresh start was needed and this could only be achieved through drastic measures. The bombs dropped by Gökçen, and her fellow combat pilots were mere instruments of this radical programme.

A military campaign accompanied by a rebuilding programme which included the construction of roads, schools, military outposts and barracks was first proposed in late 1931 but due to the devastating effects of the Great Depression, the regime was not able to financially back the project and the plan was shelved⁴⁶² but Dersim never went out of the gaze of the Republic. Planes on reconnaissance missions gathered information and topographical data, while government agents periodically sent detailed reports on the relations between the tribes of Dersim. Even the smallest incidents such as personal feuds between tribal chieftains were reported to the government.⁴⁶³ Comprehensive military reports that include detailed information on the roads, water supplies and the terrain of the region were prepared. The region was bound to Ankara with a railroad system. On December 25, 1935, the entire province was put under the authority of a military governor-general with extraordinary executive powers. The government established coalitions with some of the Dersimi tribes by utilizing the long-standing feuds between them. In the following months, military barracks, outposts, roads and telephone lines were built in the region to support the military campaign. While the government was preparing for a total assault, some of the Dersimi tribes held meetings to find out and evaluate the intentions of the government. A tribal chief called Sayyid⁴⁶⁴ Rıza (1862/1863-1937), who claimed

⁴⁶² BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.741...2.

⁴⁶³ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.742...1, BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.742...2, and BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.743...3.

⁴⁶⁴ The broadest meaning of this term is “a descendant of the prophet”. In the context of Dersim it denotes a claim of lineage to the Prophet Muhammad’s grandson Husayn ibn Ali. For more information see C.E. Bosworth, “Sayyid.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Eds.) P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2015; and “Sharif.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Eds.) P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2015.
First appeared online: 2012, First Print Edition: 1960-2007.

descent from the Prophet Muhammad and therefore enjoyed religious authority over other tribes, came to the fore as the leader of the Dersimi resistance movement. This small-scale resistance triggered the implementation of the military plans of the government. In the spring of 1937, the Republican army entered Dersim, and quickly gained ground. Most of the tribal chieftains and their families were captured. On September 11, 1937, Sayyid Rıza surrendered to the government.⁴⁶⁵ His capture brought the end of the first phase of the military campaign.

Sabiha Gökçen started her duty in the Dersim campaign in the spring of 1937. For a month, she flew almost every day and took part in both reconnaissance flights and bombing runs. She returned back to Ankara in May and did not participate in the second stage of the military operations of 1938, the phase when the real bloodshed occurred. On May 28, Gökçen was awarded a special medal for her contribution to Turkish aviation.⁴⁶⁶ From this date on, she became almost a fixture of the front pages of the newspapers. *Ulus*, the official newspaper of the regime, devoted its front page to her when she officially received her military pilot licence on June 21, 1937.⁴⁶⁷ On July 6, Gökçen was once again on the front page of the same newspaper and this time she was presented as “Our Heroic Aviator”.⁴⁶⁸ Similarly her graduation ceremony on August 30, 1937 was on the front pages of the newspapers with an inscription stating that “the Turkish nation should feel proud of our heroic aviator”. Indeed, Gökçen became a heroine of the regime. Furthermore, as a modern, independent woman who was capable of establishing herself in an environment that was previously reserved solely for men, she was the perfect embodiment of the modernizing achievements of the Republican regime. The image of young Gökçen in her pilot uniform would be the one of the most circulated images of the perceived modernity of the Turkish Republic. Gökçen’s stardom would continue with national and international flying tours. She participated in the “Great Motherland Tour”, a two thousand kilometre long tour encircling Turkey which was organized by *Türkkuşu* to popularize aviation across the country.⁴⁶⁹ Gökçen also represented the modern face of Turkey abroad; a year later,

⁴⁶⁵ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...20.

⁴⁶⁶ “Bir Türk Kızının Kazandığı Muvaffakiyet.”, *Cumhuriyet*, May 29, 1937.

⁴⁶⁷ “Dünyanın İlk Askeri Kadın Tayyarecisi Bayan Sabiha Gökçen Askeri Pilotluk Lisansını Alıyor.” *Ulus*, June 21, 1937.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ulus*, July 6, 1937.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ulus*, September 25-26, 1937.

she toured the Balkan countries with her plane.⁴⁷⁰ Altınay points out that Gökçen's fame also crossed the ocean, and several newspaper articles were written about her in the *New York Times*. These articles stated that "the appearance of a woman military flier must have been a bombshell in itself" for the residents of Dersim and celebrated the progress of Turkey which was personified in Gökçen, who represented "the advance in little more than a decade from the veil and the harem to the air pilot's helmet and the battlefield".⁴⁷¹ These statements showed that with the help of Gökçen's image, the Republican regime was successful in presenting itself to the world as a modernizing force and as an agent of progress in a region whose cultural richness and indigenous modernity were dismissed entirely by the author of the *New York Times* article, by associating it with solely with the veil and harem; the most well-known concepts of the male, orientalist fascination.

A similar orientalist approach is visible in the Republican imagination of Dersim. In fact, the Republican elite saw the social order and lifestyle in Dersim as the antithesis of Republican modernization attempts. In a speech given at the Parliament, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk stated concerning the military campaign that "there should be no obstacles left between our nation and the high civilization and welfare that it truly deserves" and thus implied that Dersim was an obstacle for reaching the ultimate goal of "high civilization".⁴⁷² The Republican media followed the same pattern. Yunus Nadi,⁴⁷³ a member of the parliament and the owner of the influential and pro-government newspaper *Cumhuriyet* depicted the campaign as "not a military campaign but a march on civilization" and defined the people of Dersim as "mountain Bedouins".⁴⁷⁴ Similarly *Kurun* newspaper described the campaign in Dersim as a fundamental part of the Turkish revolution and stated that Turkey was establishing "culture and civilization" in the region.⁴⁷⁵ According to *Son Posta* this

⁴⁷⁰ BCA: File 6152, 30...10.0.0/ 59.399...19.

⁴⁷¹ Altınay, *The Myth of the Military-Nation*, p. 45.

⁴⁷² President Atatürk's speech at the Grand Assembly, November 1, 1937. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 20, p. 3.

⁴⁷³ Yunus Nadi Abalıoğlu (1879-1945) was a journalist and politician whose name is associated with the influential *Cumhuriyet* newspaper which he owned and acted as the editor-in-chief. Nadi was a prominent name of the media during the Second Constitutional Era and a member of the last Ottoman Assembly. Prior to the First World War he befriended Mustafa Kemal and remained in his inner circle of friends until Kemal's death. When the nationalist struggle started he moved to Ankara, established the state-run press agency which is called *Anadolu Ajansı* (Anatolian Agency), and became a member of the Grand Assembly, an office which he would continue to hold until 1943.

⁴⁷⁴ Yunus Nadi, "Tunceli Vilayetimizin Islahı ve Medenileştirilmesi." *Cumhuriyet*, June 17, 1937, p. 1.

⁴⁷⁵ *Kurun*, July 8, 1937.

was a fight between two spirits, “at the end of which the spirit of civilization and progress will predominate”.⁴⁷⁶ These examples show that Republican modernism acted as if the local culture of Dersim did not exist at all. For them, Dersim was not just materialistically underdeveloped but it was also deprived of its own culture, history and civilization. Similarly to the colonialist approach, from the Republican perspective Dersim was seen as a place which is still in its natural form, devoid of any culture and civilization. For them, these features could only be inserted into the region externally by the forces of the Republic.

Sabiha Gökçen’s identity came to the help of the Republican elite to further emphasize the importance of their campaign which would bring civilization to the region. The image of historical backwardness of Dersim was deliberately placed in contrast with the modern persona of the first female fighter pilot. A newspaper article dating September 12, 1937, constitutes a quintessential example of this approach. According to *Tan* newspaper, after his capture, Gökçen allegedly met with Sayyid Rıza in person although not a single archival document, or Gökçen’s own memoir confirms this meeting. The newspaper reported the alleged meeting between Gökçen and Rıza not just as a meeting of two persons but rather as a showdown between two representatives of their respective, distinct civilizations. According to the report, Gökçen was standing victoriously while Rıza, the most powerful and respected chieftain of Dersim, which was defined as an “old bandit” by the newspaper, “appeared incapable next to the heroic Turkish girl who dropped bombs over him during the campaign”. This image alone, which personifies Sayyid Rıza and Dersim as old, weak and archaic and Gökçen and the young Turkish Republic as young, capable and modern shows how modernity was seen as the central concept in the Republican imagination regarding the military campaign in Dersim.

This attitude of the regime was not only limited to Dersim but in fact also is applicable to the formation of the basic ideological tenets and practices of the Republican regime. Politically, claiming that the Republic represented the modern norms of civilization while its political adversaries were mere instruments for reactionary ideologies and conservatism was one of the key arguments of the legitimization of the single-party rule. Furthermore, ideologically, modernization can

⁴⁷⁶ *Son Posta*, June 17, 1937.

be read as one of the central concepts of the Republican identity on which the Turkish political religion was built. As the previous chapters showed, promoting the existence of a struggle between the non-modern, eastern “past” and modern, western “present” which was represented by the Republican regime, was the central argument of the Turkish political religion. As the previous chapters show, the early Republican regime was aggressive towards any type of plurality in the political, social and cultural spheres and tried actively to mould a uniform national identity for the citizens. The key element of this new identity was modernity.

As mentioned in the previous parts of this study, the regime was extremely impatient about modernization, mostly due to the devastating effects of the losses, disasters and sufferings the Muslim Ottoman community went through in the long 19th century. Republicans, like many of their fascist and totalitarian contemporaries, believed that they were living through a ‘special time’, a watershed moment in Turkish history and they needed to act drastically, and radically to save the future of the country. Therefore they perceived the modernization issue as a life-or-death situation. For the Republican elite, modernization which they equated with Westernization was the only solution to overcome the problems that led to the demise of the Ottoman Empire. The only way for Turkey to continue its existence was modernizing as fast as possible and the most significant obstacles hindering this process were the values and traditions that emanated from the past, specifically the Islamicate, “eastern” past. Therefore, the Republican reform agenda could easily be summarized as modernizing as fast as possible, and at any cost, in every sphere of life, such as the legal system, education, the economy and industry to generate everlasting change in the traditional social order. These changes would have served the ultimate objective of altering both the look and the mind-set of the country for good, cutting off the ties with Eastern traditions and culture and firmly integrating Turkey into the Western civilization. To achieve this aim, the regime implemented a radical modernization programme.

This chapter of the thesis deals with this modernization process. The chapter will show how the strictly modernist approach of the Republican elite can be interpreted as the paramount motivation and the principal reasoning behind the ideological formation, and the key policies of the regime. The first part of this chapter deals with the concept of modernization, its historical background in Turkey, and modernization attempts on the important social issues such as women’s rights and

education. The latter part of the chapter focuses on the destruction the modernization project caused within the society, concentrating mainly on one single event; the military campaigns in the Dersim region of Eastern Turkey.

The History of Modernization in Turkey and its Influence on the Republican Ideology

The idea of modernization in Turkey did not start with the early Republican elite. The need for reforms had already started to be discussed within the Ottoman Empire in the late 16th century. These debates were focused mainly on economic corruption, worrying signals of the disappearance of harmony between certain elements of the ruling polity, and the signs of the breakdown of the system of meritocracy which gave the Ottoman Empire its unique character.⁴⁷⁷ This early and rather alarmist ‘decline’ discourse was later transformed into a series of modernizing reforms in the spheres of military and administration during the late 18th and 19th centuries, to revitalize the Ottoman power and prestige. These reforms which came to their zenith during the *Tanzimat* era,⁴⁷⁸ aimed for the preservation of the Empire and revitalization of its power.

During the *Tanzimat* era the reform programme was extended from military and administrative matters to legal, social and religious spheres. Prior to this era, the Ottoman society was divided along religious and denominational lines according to the *millet* system, in which the rights of several religious groups such as Muslims, Orthodox Christians, Armenians and Jews were recognised by the state. Although the division between these groups were not impenetrable and these communities did not live in isolation from one another,⁴⁷⁹ the reformers of the *Tanzimat* era still tried to promote an Ottoman identity to replace these identities and prevent the separatist movement in the Empire.

⁴⁷⁷ For more information on the early reform attempts within the Ottoman Empire see Bernard Lewis, “Ottoman Observers of Ottoman Decline.” *Islamic Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (March 1962), pp. 71-87.

⁴⁷⁸ For more information on the *Tanzimat* period, see Roderic H. Davison, *Reform in the Ottoman Empire, 1856-1876* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963); Carter Vaughn Findley, “The *Tanzimat*.” Reşat Kasaba (Ed.), *The Cambridge History of Turkey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 9-37., and İlber Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı* (Istanbul: Hil, 1987).

⁴⁷⁹ Donald Quataert, *The Ottoman Empire, 1700–1922* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 175.

The *Tanzimat* was a period of technical advancements as well. A new postal system, the use of telegraph and steamships were introduced and railroad construction began in this era. Another wave of modernization came in the field of education. To improve the education system which was based on Islamic *madrasah* style teaching, new elementary and secondary schools were established with a reformed, secular curriculum including arithmetic, geography and history. Although the education reform also included the establishment of a university which would integrate professional, humanistic and religious studies, much of the educational reform programme remained on paper without creating drastic changes in Ottoman society.⁴⁸⁰ Regardless, this era created a lasting heritage. An elaborate, modern bureaucracy was established and instantly become an important factor in Ottoman politics.⁴⁸¹

During the *Tanzimat* period a new front was opened in the debate on modernization. The power and the authority of the sultan started to be discussed among the intellectuals. The most influential intellectual group of the era was the Young Ottomans (*Yeni Osmanlılar*), a secret society which is regarded as “the first modern ideological movement among the Ottoman elite of the empire”.⁴⁸² The members of the society constituted a loose coalition of intellectuals who although were originated from different political backgrounds ranging “from constitutionalist liberalism to modernist Islamism, and even to nascent Turkish nationalism and socialism”, still managed to find a common ground in constitutionalism.⁴⁸³ Young Ottomans criticized the *Tanzimat* period for its various shortcomings including the nepotism within the bureaucracy, corruption of the bureaucrats, and imitation of the West without considering the importance of the Ottoman/Islamic past. Instead of a bureaucrat-led reform programme they promoted the idea of a constitutional regime, in which the real power would be in the hands of the society. Following the financial difficulties exacerbated by the global market crash of 1873, their ideas gained ground among the bureaucratic and the military elites, and led to a *coup d'état* in which the ruling Sultan Abdülaziz (r. 1861-1876) was replaced first with Murad V, and later with

⁴⁸⁰ Ira M. Lapidus, *A History of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 495.

⁴⁸¹ According to Anscombe, after the reforms, the number of Ottoman bureaucrats increased from a mere 2,000 in 1800 to 50,000 members in 1900. See Anscombe, p. 99.

⁴⁸² Zürcher, *Turkey – A Modern History*, p. 70.

⁴⁸³ Ortaylı, *İmparatorluğun En Uzun Yüzyılı*, pp. 212-213.

Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1876. Following his ascension to the throne a new constitution was promulgated and a constitutional monarchy was established.

After the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in 1876, a bicameral parliamentary system was installed in the Ottoman Empire. However, this system was abolished by Sultan Abdülhamid II until 1878 when the Sultan suspended the constitution, and dismissed the Parliament altogether after its members criticized the handling of the disastrous Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78. Although Abdülhamid's regime which lasted more than thirty years, was authoritarian and religiously conservative, during his reign the modernization in the spheres of education, military and transportation continued, or indeed intensified. In fact, Abdülhamid's enthusiastic reforms concerning the military led to the emergence of a new class of young idealist officers who felt a strong attachment to the ideal of "rescuing the motherland".⁴⁸⁴ The need for saving the country from the authoritarian rule of the Sultan also became widespread among the members of the intelligentsia. Though their actions were closely monitored by the regime, they still managed to build close contacts with Europe and the Turks living in Russia. In time the paths of these two groups converged in the form of the Young Turk movement.

'Young Turk' (*Jön Türkler*) was an umbrella term for a movement that had members from many different ideological currents ranging from liberals to nationalists who agreed on the lowest common denominator, a regime change to oust the sultan and stop the dissolution of the Empire. Within this group, and by their interactions with other ideologies existing in the Empire, the need of modernisation as well as its scale, and the areas which needed to be modernised constituted the source of major intellectual debates during the last years of the Ottoman Empire. Ziya Gökalp, in his influential article "The Three Currents" (*Üç Cereyan*), on the late Ottoman ideologies stated that the idea of modernization was an essential tenet within every political movement of the era.⁴⁸⁵ Indeed, modernisation has been a crucial part of the respective political agendas of all major ideological currents of the late Ottoman period, whether in the form of mere technicism, or in the shape of more socially and political penetrating reforms.

⁴⁸⁴ Mardin, "Yenileşme Dinamiğinin Temelleri ve Atatürk.", p. 218.

⁴⁸⁵ Ziya Gökalp, *Üç Cereyan – Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muasırlaşmak* (İstanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2007 [1918]), p. 45.

For instance, Islamic revivalism (*İslamcılık*), one of the major political movements of the late Ottoman period, although suggesting a return to the core Islamic values and institutions of the alleged “Golden Age of Islam”, repeatedly mentioned the existence of an urgent need for matching the technological advancements of the modern world. According to Mehmet Akif Ersoy,⁴⁸⁶ a prominent Islamist of the era, it was “impossible to deny the importance of European science, knowledge, civilization and the industrial progress” but their treatment towards the oppressed people in their colonies, “the way they cruelly make these poor people suffer” made him to believe that the morality of the Western powers did not match their material advancements. Therefore Akif suggested that Muslims of the Empire should only embrace the scientific progress of the West.⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, supporters of the Turkist (*Türkçülük*) worldview, while favouring a union of all Turks instead of an Islamic one, never shied away from getting inspired by the modern technological domination of the West. For instance Gökalp, the paramount Turkish nationalist thinker of his era, stated that Turks needed “to build ships, locomotives, airplanes, and automobiles and use them like Europeans do”.⁴⁸⁸

For Islamic revivalism and Turkism, modernization on certain fields such as military organization and technology were seen as crucial for the survival of the sacred values which are associated with these ideologies. Modernity itself was not the ultimate aim, it was merely an instrument to fight the oppressive powers of the West in a war of life and death. Witnessing the dissolution of the Empire made the proponents of these ideologies adamant on the necessity of modernization. In Akif’s

⁴⁸⁶ Mehmet Akif Ersoy (1873-1936) was a poet, and politician. Known as the “national poet” of Turkey, Ersoy is the author of the *İstiklâl Marşı*, the anthem of the nationalist movement in Ankara, and later, of the Turkish Republic. Akif worked as editor-in-chief in *Sırat-ı Müstakim* and *Sebilürreşad*, two influential Islamist-Modernist periodicals. In these publications Akif supported the idea of an Islamic revival based on the return to the values of Quran, a union of all Muslims and the adoption of Western technology. As a fervent patriot, Akif worked with the Special Organization (*Teşkilât-ı Mahsusa*) during the First World War and performed propaganda activities in the Arabic parts of the Empire to counter the British plan to stage an Arab Revolt against the Ottoman government. During the Turkish War of Independence, he sided with the nationalists in Ankara, became a Parliament member and promoted the nationalist cause in Anatolia by delivering sermons. In March 1921, a poem of Akif was accepted as the national anthem by the Parliament in Ankara. After the end of the War, Akif became a political dissident and despite his stature as a poet, his fame and patriotic activities during the War, he left the country in 1924 and moved to Egypt. For an in-depth analysis of Akif’s ideology, see Esther Debus, *Sebilürreşad: Eine vergleichende Untersuchung der islamischen Opposition der vor- und nachkemalistischen Ära* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1991).

⁴⁸⁷ Mehmed Akif Ersoy, “Nasrullah Kürsüsünden Türk Milletine.” *Sebilürreşad*, No. 464 (November 25, 1920), pp. 496-516.

⁴⁸⁸ Gökalp, *Üç Cereyan*, p. 11.

words Muslims should never let their negative feelings towards Europeans prevent them from adopting technical and scientific advancements of the West, because without modernization, it was “impossible for the nation to survive”.⁴⁸⁹ For these two major ideologies of the late Ottoman era, modernization was needed to compete with European powers but Turks should “only adopt scientific and practical tools from Europe”, not their life-style.⁴⁹⁰ For the Islamist and Turkist intellectuals, aside from their apparent technical superiority, the remaining aspects of the Western modernity, especially the materialistic outlook on life which was prevalent among the Western societies, were associated with the detriment of the moral values and with the cultural erosion in the Ottoman Empire. According to these schools of thought, these factors contributed to the “Ottoman decline” that ended with the Empire’s subjugation to the West, and therefore importing Western ideals that were not related to the technical advancements should be avoided at all costs.

On the other hand, for the members of the Westernization (*Garbcılık*) movement⁴⁹¹ – the last political group in Gökalp’s categorization and the one from which a significant part of the early Republican ruling elite originated, modernity represented much more than the material advancements of the West. For instance for Abdullah Cevdet,⁴⁹² “there was no other civilization than the Western one”⁴⁹³ and it should be adapted to Turkey in its entirety. Similarly, İsmail Hakkı Kılıçzade,⁴⁹⁴ who

⁴⁸⁹ Ersoy, “Nasrullah Kürsüsünden Türk Milletine.”, p. 498.

⁴⁹⁰ Gökalp, *Üç Cereyan*, p. 12.

⁴⁹¹ For a summary of the ideology of this movement, see M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Garbcılar: Their Attitudes toward Religion and Their Impact on the Official Ideology of the Turkish Republic.” *Studia Islamica*, No. 86 (1997), pp. 133-158.

⁴⁹² Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932) was a physician, poet, translator, intellectual and a founding member of the Committee of Union and Progress. As a fervent anti-monarchist, he was forced to live in exile in Tripoli, Geneva and Cairo until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. During his exile, he started to publish the periodical *İctihâd*, which he continued to publish until 1930s. In *İctihâd*, Cevdet supported a complete transformation of the Ottoman, and later the Turkish society by adopting secular, Western values, and a materialistic outlook on life. After the establishment of the Republic, Cevdet did not take any public office but he continued to be an influence on Atatürk. For a collection of his most influential essays see, Mustafa Gündüz (Ed.) *İctihad'ın İctihadı: Dr. Abdullah Cevdet'ten Seçme Yazılar* (Ankara: Lotus, 2008). For an analysis of his ideology, see Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri, 1895-1908* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2008 [1964]), pp. 225-255, and M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Ankara: Ugdal, 1981).

⁴⁹³ M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Atatürk: An Intellectual Biography* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2011), p. 61.

⁴⁹⁴ İsmail Hakkı Kılıçzade (later Kılıçoğlu) (1872-1960) was a military officer, intellectual and politician. He wrote for the periodicals *İctihâd*, *Hürriyet-i Fikriye* and *Serbest Fikir*. A series of articles called “A Very Vigilant Sleep” (*Pek Uyanık Bir Uyku*) which he published in *İctihâd* in 1912 proved to be influential on the modernizing reforms of the Republican regime. After the establishment of the Republic, Kılıçzade served as a Parliament member from 1927 to 1946 from the ruling Republican People’s Party. For his influential articles in *İctihâd*, see Hanioglu, “Garbcılar.”, pp. 150-158.

wrote in 1912 a series of articles Cevdet's periodical, *İctihâd*, proposed a wide array of modernizing reforms ranging from the introduction of a new headgear to the abolishment of religious schools⁴⁹⁵ the majority of which were implemented years later by the Republicans. Furthermore, Cevdet's views on what type of a system should replace the Ottoman monarchy almost summarizes the future policies of the early Republican elite. According to Cevdet, the new regime "should build a barrier in front of the movements of the past which prevented harmony and progress, and smash the superstitious beliefs into pieces under the guidance of intelligence, science and industrial development". Cevdet sets the final target of the future reforms as being "to increase the knowledge of the people to such a level, that they would never allow malicious rulers to rule over them again".⁴⁹⁶ This discourse which glorifies science while ridiculing belief as superstition and suggests that poor governance is a disease which is curable through knowledge is in perfect accordance with the early Republican ideology.

According to Hanioglu, intellectuals such as Cevdet and Kılıçzade were very influential on the theoretical development of the Republican elite. Following their example, the Republicans opted for a total transformation of society instead of settling solely for reforms on technology. For this elite, modernization was synonymous with Westernization. Atatürk, himself, stated that "although there are many countries in the world, there is just one civilization and for the progress of our nation, it should be a part of this civilization". He further commented that throughout their history Turks moved westward, and this custom would continue during the Republican era.⁴⁹⁷ In a different speech, Atatürk remarked that it was impossible for Turkey to survive without Westernization because "resistance to the storming impulse of the civilization is futile" and "societies which follow the static medieval laws, ideas and behaviours are bound to demise and captivity".⁴⁹⁸ Atatürk's perspective regarding Western civilization being the only civilization suggests that a form of Orientalism is traceable within the actions of the single-party regime. This attitude could be described as "auto-

⁴⁹⁵ Hanioglu, *Atatürk*, p. 61.

⁴⁹⁶ Tarık Zafer Tunaya, "Türkiye'nin Gelişme Seyri İçinde İkinci Jön Türk Hareketinin Fikri Esasları." *Tahir Taner'e Armağan* (İstanbul: İstanbul Üniversitesi Yayınları, 1956), pp. 167-187.

⁴⁹⁷ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 68.

⁴⁹⁸ Kili, "Türk Devrimi.", p. 69.

orientalism”, an attitude which emanates from native people of the East who decided, or were forced, to look to their native lands through the lenses of the West.

According to Edward Said, from the Western perspective, Europe represents the standards by which the rest of the world has to be judged. The orient, which was essentialized by the West, is perceived as static and underdeveloped in comparison with the developed, rational, and superior Europe, therefore its path to modernization should be to follow, in fact even to mimic the European example.⁴⁹⁹ Similarly, Mitchell states that, “modernization continues to be commonly understood as a process begun and finished in Europe, from where it has been exported across ever-expanding regions of the non-west. The destiny of those regions had been to mimic, never quite successfully, the history already performed by the West. To become modern, it is still said, or today become postmodern, is to act like West”.⁵⁰⁰ The Republican ruling elite of Turkey followed this pattern. For Atatürk and his fellow Republican modernisers, modernity was established in the developed world through a linear process, a continuous forward motion in history. It was a more elaborate phenomenon than mere technical development, it was rather a mind-set which was built slowly over time by the pivotal events and influential ideological and cultural trends of European history, such as the Renaissance, the Reform and Enlightenment, the emergence of nation-state, the French Revolution and positivism. Therefore the entire historical background of the West needed to be replicated as quickly as possible regardless of the social, cultural, or economic exceptions of post-Ottoman Turkish society. For the Republican elite, it was only through following the Western example that Turkish society could transform from a traditional society to a modern and industrialized one.

The Republican world-view did not allow several contemporary modernities to co-exist with one another. Western modernity was almost a Platonic ideal form; while the rest of the world lived on the fringes of it, powerless, and bound to be exploited by the West. Republican interpretation of the “Ottoman decline” was also powered by this view. A complex notion such as the dissolution of the empire is often associated with the resistance showed by Ottoman dynasty to the changing ways of

⁴⁹⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978).

⁵⁰⁰ Timothy Mitchell, “The Stage of Modernity.” Timothy Mitchell (Ed.) *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), p.1.

the West and their reluctance to adopt Western modernity with its institutions, mindset and outlook in its entirety. This was perceived as a mistake which should not be repeated by the Republic. After the establishment of the Republic, especially after the end of competitive politics in 1925, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's own vision, which was influenced by the late Ottoman era intellectuals, overtook the role of being the sole path of modernization. Islamists, like Mehmet Akif Ersoy were forced to leave the political sphere to the Republicans. Similarly, Turkists were tamed by the regime, abandoned their dreams of uniting all Turkish speaking people under a single flag and joined the Republican camp. After that, modernization became a state project in Turkey while the single-party started to act as a vanguard party to control, direct and shape this state-sponsored modernization project.

To understand the urgency of this call for total transformation, one must also take the life experiences of the Republican elite into consideration. Most of them spent their lives observing one humiliating defeat after another, witnessing the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. For instance Atatürk's personal experience was nothing short of catastrophic. He witnessed that the Empire he was born into crumbling down. His birthplace, the cities where he was raised and educated were lost to the same Balkan powers which were subjugated for centuries by the Ottoman Empire. The only feeling of accomplishment for his generation was the establishment of an independent Republic which was wrested out of the hands of the Allied Forces at the end of the First World War. Therefore their fanatical dedication to the modernization programme can be perceived as a reasonable strategy to protect what they fought for. Their methods, however, are open to discussion and criticism.

Republican Modernization

As mentioned in the introduction, the early Republican ideology was based on two objectives; establishing an easily controllable monolithic ideal community and modernizing as soon as possible in every sphere of life, such as law, education, economy and industry to generate everlasting change in the social sphere and secure the future of the country. Republican modernization promoted more than mere technicism, it sought the replacement of the Islamic-Ottoman tradition, a tradition regarded by the Republican elite as foreign to the Turkish nation whose pre-Islamic

past was equally glorious as the heyday of the Ottoman Empire, and incompatible with Western culture which was defined by the Republicans as the “universal civilization”. From this model Mustafa Kemal and his allies formed a fanatical modernist approach deeply devoted to the non-religious sections of the national culture that they promoted and at times even had to manufacture.

In the early Republican era the materialistic outlook on life was endorsed. People were encouraged to gain knowledge in sciences, both natural and social, and to use scientific methods in their field of work. The technological advancements of the West were followed closely and adopted when feasible. Women’s rights were supported as a state policy and ground-breaking reforms were made to promote gender equality. A program of modernization in the fields of industry and transportation was set in motion. The health system was modernized and projects to fight infectious diseases were implemented.⁵⁰¹ Educational reform which included some of the most radical transformations such as the switch from the Perso-Arabic script to the Latin alphabet targeted the total Westernization of this field. Accompanied by a literacy campaign, the alphabet change proved to be successful. Nearly all of these reforms had no popular support and were not implemented due to public demand, they were rather state-projects, while most of them were the pet projects of the leader Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself. Aside from some exceptions, such as the reforms regarding women’s rights, in Republican modernization people were passive; the motor of change was the state. Many modernizing reforms implemented by the Republican ruling elite targeted social elements and concepts which the single-party associated with Islam and Oriental traditions. Most of these reforms were performed after 1925, following the end of the multi-party regime and the cleansing of dissidents from the political sphere during the closing of the Progressive Republican Party in June 1925, and the trials of 1926 following the assassination attempt on Atatürk’s life. The more the regime felt secure and uncontested, the more the reforms gained momentum and grew more radical.

The first significant reform of this period was the abolition of the *fez* aimed at westernizing the appearance of the people which was introduced in November 1925.

⁵⁰¹ For a review of the Republican fight against infectious diseases, see Halis Akder, “Forgotten Campaigns: A History of Disease in Turkey.” Celia Kerslake, Kerem Öktem & Philip Robins (Eds.), *Turkey’s Engagement with Modernity: Conflict and Change in the Twentieth Century* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 220-226.

The *Fez* was a brimless hat of North African origin which was adopted in 1829 as the universal male headgear in the Ottoman Empire as part of the modernizing reforms of Sultan Mahmud II. Before this reform in the Ottoman world various headgear had represented the social status and religious identity of its owner. With the introduction of *fez* to replace other headgear, the Sultan tried to change the “centuries-old Ottoman tradition in which headgear had provided the crucial and central marker of identity, status, and rank” and create a uniformity between the Muslim and non-Muslim parts of the society.⁵⁰² After its adoption, the *fez* quickly became part of Ottoman identity to such a point that in the West it started to be seen as the definite symbol of ‘Ottomanness’. Ironically when this headgear, whose adoption constituted an important reform of its time, started to be associated with the Oriental appearance, it gained more significance among the conservatives and started to be associated with the Islamic identity while simultaneously losing appeal for the younger generations of the Westernization supporters, to which most of the Republican elite belonged. For them, the *fez* had become an icon of the backwardness of the Ottoman society. These clashing perception started intellectual debated between the supporters of both sides of the argument.

Examples of these debates among the intellectuals can be found in the writings of İsmail Hakkı Kılıçzade, Abdullah Cevdet and Süleyman Nazif.⁵⁰³ As early as 1915, Kılıçzade wrote that wearing a *fez* had nothing to with Islam, and therefore wearing a western-style hat would not contradict with the beliefs of the Ottoman society. Starting from 1924, Cevdet and Nazif wrote several articles targeting the conservative parts of society who were supporting the *fez* almost as an integral part of the Islamic creed and objecting to the use of Western style hats, by giving rather unsubstantial evidence from the *hadith* literature. They claimed that *fez* was not an integral part of Islam, and stated

⁵⁰² Donald Quataert. “Clothing Laws, State, and Society in the Ottoman Empire, 1720-1829.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3 (August 1997), pp. 403-425.

⁵⁰³ Süleyman Nazif (1869-1927) was a poet, intellectual and bureaucrat. Known for his wit, he was one of the most prominent intellectuals of the late Ottoman era. Nazif initially criticized the Hamidian regime and contributed articles to Young Turk journals but later he made peace with the regime and returned to Turkey. After the revolution of 1908 he was appointed as the governor of Basra, Mosul and Baghdad provinces before taking his leave from politics in 1915 to concentrate on literature. Due to an article he wrote criticizing the occupation of Istanbul by the Allied Forces (“Kara Bir Gün” - *A Black Day*) he was blacklisted by the Allies and in March 1920 he was sent to prison in Malta due to a nationalist speech he gave at the remembrance ceremony for Pierre Loti. He returned to Istanbul in October 1921 and continued to write for the *Resimli Ay* newspaper. For more information on Nazif, see Syed Tanvir Wasti, “Süleyman Nazif – A Multi-Faceted Personality.” *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3 (May 2014), pp. 493-508.

that the Muslim community of Turkey was losing time and energy by arguing about such a trivial matter. Nazif further argued that Islam should not be reduced to mere appearance and the aims and objectives of the Muslims should be much holier issues than defending a type of clothing which has no place in any previous Islamic source.⁵⁰⁴ Against the backdrop of these intellectual debates, in the summer of 1925, Atatürk started to publicly wear a western-style hat during his tour of various Anatolian cities. In August 1925, he delivered a fervent speech in Inebolu in favour of the western-style hat. In this speech he likened Turkish people wearing the Oriental clothing to a “very precious jewel covered in mud” and stated that a change of style was necessary to show the world the real value of the Turkish people.⁵⁰⁵ These remarks show that Atatürk himself had complaints about the Orientalist approach of the West and feared that the Westerners would continue to see backwardness upon looking at the attire of the Turks regardless of their actual progress and accomplishments. Following his tour and the speech at Inebolu, a bill was proposed to the Grand Assembly to make the western-style hat the official headgear of the parliament members, civil servants, and to outlaw the public use of any other headgear.⁵⁰⁶ In the meeting on November 25, 1925, the proposal was discussed and a huge majority of the Grand Assembly supported the bill. The statements of the parliament members resembled Atatürk’s approach. The general discourse of the deputies was that the *fez* was hindering the Turkish people “from entering among the civilized and modern nations”, therefore it should be replaced by the hat, “the most obvious characteristic of the common Western apparel”. The only objection to the new headgear bill was based on the premise that the proposal was conflicting with several articles of the constitution which protected the freedom of the individuals and it was quickly ruled out.⁵⁰⁷

⁵⁰⁴ For a summary of these articles which includes a colourful debate between Suleyman Nazif and religious scholar İskilipli Âtîf Hoca who fervently opposed the use of Western-style hats, see Selami Kılıç, “Şapka Meselesi ve Kılık Kıyafet İnkılâbı.” *Ankara Üniversitesi Türk İnkılâp Tarihi Enstitüsü Dergisi: Atatürk Yolu*. Vol. 4, No. 16 (1995), pp. 529-547.

⁵⁰⁵ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, pp. 218-222.

⁵⁰⁶ The clothing of the state officials responsible of religious duties were excluded from this bill. For the full text of the resolution, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 19, p. 231.

⁵⁰⁷ The objection was voiced by Nureddin İbrahim Konyar (Sakallı Nurettin Paşa - Bearded Nurettin Pasha) (1873-1932), a retired general who was one of the few remaining independent MPs in the Parliament. He was a rather infamous, and a divisive figure of the late-Ottoman Empire. His admirers praised him for his military skills, especially his contribution to the victory at Kut (1916) while his critics blamed him for the massacres against the Greek citizens of the Empire (1919-1922), harassment of civilians in the Eastern province of Sivas (1921), as well as the lynching of the anti-nationalist journalist Ali Kemal and Smyrna’s last Greek Orthodox bishop Chrysostomos and the Great Fire of Smyrna (1922). His objection to the headgear law must have made Atatürk rather furious, because in

The ratification of the Law on Headgear (*Şapka Kanunu*) was the first step in the chain of reforms targeting to reduce the visibility and significance of religion, religious institutions and traditions. The abolition of the *dervish* lodges (*Tekke*) and Sufi religious orders (*Tarikat*) that had represented heterodox Islam for centuries and had a stronger influence on the people than the official, state version of Islam followed this reform. Once again the first indication of this reform was a speech of Atatürk. On August 30, 1925 Atatürk delivered a speech concerning the situation of Sufi religious orders at a gathering in the Republican People's Party centre of Kastamonu province in Northern Anatolia and stated that "hoping for the help of long dead is a disgrace for a civilized society" and "the Republic of Turkey will never be the land of *sheikhs*,⁵⁰⁸ *dervishes*,⁵⁰⁹ *murids*,⁵¹⁰ and religious lunatics. The only true *tarik*, is the *tarik* of civilization".⁵¹¹ Following his guidance, a new bill which ratified in the Grand Assembly on November 30, 1925 stating that all buildings designed for the gatherings of Sufi brotherhoods, unless part of a mosque which served the people, would be closed. All religious and spiritual titles derived from leading, serving in or being a member of a religious order or performing a heterodox religious or spiritual acts such as being a *sheikh*, *dervish*, *murid*, *dede*,⁵¹² *seyyid*,⁵¹³ *baba*,⁵¹⁴ *khalifa*,⁵¹⁵ fortune-teller, sorcerer, spiritual healer, clairvoyant or *muska* maker⁵¹⁶ were forbidden and became punishable criminal acts.⁵¹⁷ The law was very comprehensive and the inclusion of the

Nutuk, Atatürk devoted an unusually large amount of time to criticizing him for his actions in the War of Independence, and for his character. In my copy of *Nutuk*, eighteen pages were allocated to condemn Nurettin Pasha, which is much higher than the amount of time devoted to criticize more significant names of the opposition. For Nurettin Pasha's objection to the proposal and the following debates, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 19, pp. 222-232. For Atatürk's attacks on Nurettin Pasha see, Atatürk, *Nutuk*, pp. 707-727.

⁵⁰⁸ The leader of an Islamic religious order.

⁵⁰⁹ A follower of a Sufi teaching known for their extreme poverty and austerity.

⁵¹⁰ An aspirant member of a Sufi order who follows a *murshid* (guide).

⁵¹¹ Here Atatürk makes a word-play. *Tarikat*, the Turkish word of Arabic origin for religious order literary means "path". By using the word *tarik*, he meant that the only path that must be followed for enlightenment is the path of modernization, not Sufism. For the whole speech, see Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, pp. 223-228.

⁵¹² Leaders of the Alevi-Bektashi religious orders.

⁵¹³ Religious title which is especially used in Alevi-Bektashi orders that claim descendancy from Prophet Mohammed's family, specifically from his grandson Husayn ibn Ali.

⁵¹⁴ Leaders of the Bektashi religious orders.

⁵¹⁵ Religious order member who is nominated by the Sheikh as his successor during his lifetime to take over the lead of the order following his death.

⁵¹⁶ *Muska* is triangular-shaped amulet, containing verses from the Quran or other prayers and traditionally wrapped in leather. It is believed that they protect the wearer from harm and bring them good luck.

⁵¹⁷ For the parliamentary debates on the text of the proposal, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 19, pp. 281-289. For the full-text of the legislation, see *Resmî Gazete*, No. 243 (December 12, 1925), Law No. 677, p. 113.

not strictly Islamic practices of fortune-telling, and sorcery in the legislation along with the well-organized and structured Sufi brotherhoods showed that for the Republican elite there was not much difference between these diverse social actors. This perception is in line with Linz's theory on political religions using "anti-religious formulations that identify religion with superstition".⁵¹⁸ Furthermore, in Atatürk's speech at Kastamonu the leaders and the disciples of the Sufi religious orders were put together in the same group with 'religious lunatics' which proved further evidence for Republican elite's strictly positivist approach of seeing every single element of heterodox Islam as a kind of lunacy, or deception, and initially as a hindrance to reaching the level of Western civilization. These twin laws of November 1925 did meet with a considerable resistance. Mobile Independence Courts started to work again. At least 57 people were sentenced to death due to their resistance to the Law of Headgear and the closing of Sufi religious orders between December 1925 and February 1926.⁵¹⁹

The reforms which targeted the reduction of the visibility and significance of religion in the social sphere continued with attempts to de-Islamify the legal sphere. Once again, the start of the legal reforms was signalled by Atatürk himself. In his opening speech of the legislative year in November 1, 1925, he remarked that the new penal code, the civil code and the code of commerce should be prepared within the present legislative year.⁵²⁰ Atatürk added that these new legal codes must follow the examples of the codes of modern civilization which further demonstrates the agenda of these reforms. The legal codes which were ordered by Atatürk were prepared within four months and were presented to the attention of the Grand Assembly in February 1926. The debates started with the new civil code which was proposed to replace the *Medjelle*, the civil code of the Ottoman Empire which was in use since 1869. While the *Medjelle* was based on *sharia*; the Islamic law and took its source from the Quran, the *hadith* attributed to the Prophet Mohammed and the previous decisions and

⁵¹⁸ Linz, "The Religious Use of Politics and/or the Political Use of Religion", pp. 102-104.

⁵¹⁹ Tunçay, *Türkiye'de Tek Parti*, p. 116.

⁵²⁰ President Atatürk's speech at the Grand Assembly, November 1, 1925. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 19, p. 10.

opinions of Muslim jurists,⁵²¹ the new civil code was adapted from the Swiss civil code.

During the debates in the parliament, the religious basis of the previous code was criticized while the improvements, especially the improvements regarding women rights in the new civil code were celebrated by several parliament members. Mahmut Esat Bozkurt, the Minister of Justice, summarized that the main improvements of the code were in the fields of family organisation, inheritance rules and equal rights between the sexes, issues which were all related to the rights of the women. Similarly, Şükrü Kaya, the Minister of the Interior, praised the law for giving back the rights to Turkish women that they truly deserved for their self-sacrifice and virtues they had shown for centuries. Regarding the fact that the new civil code was almost a word for word translation of the Swiss civil code, Besim Atalay, the deputy for Aksaray, defended the code from possible objections by expressing that the Republic should follow the lead of the West in the field of law as well, just as it was already following the West in the spheres of social and natural sciences. Atalay warned the other parliament members that if Turkey would not follow the example of the Western world, its existence would be in danger similarly to other Islamic regions such as Sudan, Morocco, and Bukhara.⁵²² Yusuf Kemal Tengirşenk, the deputy for Sinop, similarly supported the progressive nature of the new civil code and stated that the new code would definitely clash with the traditions of society but that society should embrace this change, should not let traditions shape the legal code but instead let the legal code shape the traditions of society. Bozkurt, when closing the debates, similarly stated that traditions and religious beliefs should not form the basis of a legal system because they are static, resistant to change while life and the needs of the societies constantly evolve. Bozkurt added that, therefore laws based on religion would freeze the societies in the backward ages of the emergence of their respective religions. The Minister of Justice continued that to reach a certain level of civilization, secularism was a necessity. In fact, the leitmotif of all of these speeches was a staunch belief in

⁵²¹ For more information on *Medjelle*, see Carter Vaughn Findley, "Medjelle." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*. Brill Online, 2015. First appeared online: 2012, First Print Edition: 1960-2007.

⁵²² The Muslim entities mentioned here were all recently succumbed to the Western expansionism. Sudan, which was once a part of the Ottoman Empire was ruled since 1899 by the British Empire. The joint forces of France and Spain had recently suppressed a Berber uprising and retaken the control of Morocco in 1925. The Central Asian Turkic state of Emirate of Bukhara was invaded by the Soviet troops in September 1920.

secularism, and in the need for progress which would only been possible by following Western examples.

The new civil code was ratified by unanimous vote on February 17, 1926.⁵²³ As the parliament members stated, the most significant improvements concerned the rights of the women. The code officially ended polygamy, guaranteed their right to work and of Islamic practices which did not accept equality between the sexes in regards of testimony and divorce⁵²⁴ ceased to be sources of law. This code would be followed by the ratification of other legal codes, most importantly, the penal code which was adapted from the Italians and a code of commerce modelled after German and Italian examples. In 1928, according to the principle of secularism, the expression announcing that the official religion of the country was Islam was removed from the constitution; thus Islam ceased to be the state religion. Several further reforms targeting Islamic traditions followed the legal reforms. In 1926, the regime decided to adopt the Gregorian calendar instead of the Islamic calendar. In 1931 Ottoman units of measurements were replaced with the metric system. These reforms, along with that, was accepted in 1935, designating Sunday as the official day of rest instead of Friday, the sacred day for Muslims, were made to harmonize commerce with the Western world while simultaneously moving away from the common culture of the Islamicate societies.

The Alphabet Reform, the Literacy Campaign and Republican Education

The most controversial reform of this era was the switch from the Arabo-Persian alphabet to the Latin alphabet. According to Feroz Ahmad, with this reform Turkey cut its historic ties with the East and the Islamic world, on a level and scope far beyond any other Republican reforms.⁵²⁵ Similarly Geoffrey Lewis states, that the “purpose of the change of alphabet was to break Turkey's ties with the Islamic East”.⁵²⁶ During the entirety of the lifespan of the Ottoman Empire, Turkish was written mainly in

⁵²³ For the debates at the Grand Assembly, and for the full text of the civil code of 1926, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 22, pp. 229-237 and the attached file, pp. 1-102.

⁵²⁴ In Islamic law the testimony of a woman is worth half of a man. According to various hadith collections this is due to the perceived “deficiency” in their intelligence in comparison with men. The divorce procedures in Islam also favour the men; for men divorce is easily obtained, while obtaining divorce for women is typically quite difficult.

⁵²⁵ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, p. 100.

⁵²⁶ Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 27.

Arabo-Persian script.⁵²⁷ In addition to the Arabo-Persian script, the Armenian and Greek members of the Empire employed their respective alphabets as well to write the dominant language of the Empire.⁵²⁸ After the elimination and the expelling of these minorities, in the post-Ottoman setting Turkish continued to be written with Arabo-Persian letters but for many linguists the script and the characteristics of the language did not harmoniously match each other. Lewis summarizes the problems of the alphabet as follows: There were no vowels in the Arabo-Persian alphabet that correspond to many vowels of the Turkish language, every letter was shown with different signs at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the words, some letters in the Arabo-Persian alphabet represent sounds that do not exist in Turkish and some letters represented more than one sound in Turkish which created confusion. For instance, the letter ‘*kef*’ in the Arabo-Persian alphabet represented the letters ‘*g, k, n,* and ‘*y*’ in Turkish.⁵²⁹ Therefore, words that sound entirely different and had different meanings were sometimes shown with the exact same Arabic letters. For instance, three distinct Turkish words; *eğlenmek* (‘to have fun’), *eklenmek* (‘to be added’) and *eylenmek* (‘to linger’) were all written with the same Arabic letters.⁵³⁰ Similarly, with the Arabic letters *alif-waw-nun*, the Turkish words *on* (‘ten’), *un* (‘flour’) and *ün* (‘fame’) could be written.⁵³¹

Even before the Republican reforms there were debates among the Ottoman intellectuals over how to make the alphabet more suitable for the Turkish language.⁵³² Starting from the *Tanzimat* era, several plans were proposed to increase the suitability of the Arabo-Persian alphabet. Some of these were: showing every vowel with diacritics inherited from Arabic; abandoning the practice of joining letters together; adding new letters to represent the missing vowels; showing the letters with only one form regardless of their position within the word; showing every vowel in a word with a letter to make the words easier to read and prevent confusing them with other words written with similar consonants and lastly; and switching to the Latin alphabet. Some

⁵²⁷ The alphabet of Ottomans was the Arabic alphabet with additional Persian letters for the sounds *pe*, *che*, and *je*.

⁵²⁸ Benjamin C. Fortna, *Learning to Read in the Late Ottoman Empire and the Early Turkish Republic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 10-11.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁰ Sadri Maksudi Arsal, “Latin Harflerini Niçin Kabul Ettik?” *Türk Yurdu* (March-April 1930), p. 122.

⁵³¹ Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 28.

⁵³² For a summary of these debates, see Hüseyin Yorulmaz, *Tanzimattan Cumhuriyete Alfabe Tartışmaları* (Istanbul: Kitabevi, 1995), and Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, pp. 27-32.

of these reforms were implemented to various degrees of success but the search for a more suitable alphabet continued. It should be noted that the impetus for these proposals and reforms were mostly practicability, and not ideological concerns, but the reformers were aware of the fact that the Arabic letters were embedded to the religious fabrics of the society. An early reform attempt proposed in 1863 for adding additional vowels to the Arabo-Persian alphabet that correspond to uniquely Turkish sounds was refused on the grounds of that “it would conduce to the oblivion of ancient Islamic works”.⁵³³

The discussion on the possibility of switching to the Latin alphabet intensified after the establishment of the Republic. According to Lewis, Mustafa Kemal, who was keen on implementing the reform, felt in 1923 that it was still early to carry out such a drastic reform. The dissolution of the opposition in 1925-1926 and the success of the following reforms which ended with the reduction of the visibility and significance of religion, and religious institutions in the political, social, cultural and legal spheres that were implemented between 1925 and 1928 must have changed his mind because in the summer of 1928 Atatürk has decided to carry out the alphabet reform. The final decision for the alphabet reform was taken in late May 1928 and in the following July it was planned to form an alphabet commission to prepare a modified version of the Latin alphabet suitable for Turkish.⁵³⁴ Atatürk announced the decision to switch alphabets on August 9 by and the necessary regulations were passed in the Grand Assembly on November 1, 1928. Therefore between the summer of 1928 and the ratification of the legislature, a part of the population, especially bureaucrats already became familiar with the new alphabet.

On the day of the ratification of the regulations concerning the new alphabet at the single-party dominated parliament, there were no heated discussions on the proposed law. Instead, there were only a couple of celebratory speeches. Atatürk’s opening speech had set the tone. He remarked that with the ratification of the legislation which is officially called “On the Adoption and Application of the New Turkish Letters”, the Turkish nation would enter into a “universe of light”. Refik

⁵³³ Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 28.

⁵³⁴ BCA: File A1, 30...1.0.0/ 1.4...12. The Latin alphabet was not copied in its entirety. In the Turkish version of the alphabet, some letters of the Latin alphabet such as “Q” were left out and some letters, such as “Ç” which correspond to the Turkish sound “ch” were added. The commission determined these details after a series of debates.

Koraltan, the deputy of Konya, similarly emphasized that Turkey would “once again be a part of the enlightened world” and criticized the old Arabic letters for “hindering the nation from the path of progress for centuries”. The nationalist poet and parliament member Mehmet Emin Yurdakul⁵³⁵ stated that the new letters would change the destiny of the Turkish people, just as the Hebrew letters used by the Prophet Moses when writing the Ten Commandments changed the destiny of his own people. These examples once again demonstrated several significant elements that determined the mind-set of the Republican elite. The blame for the perceived underdevelopment of the nation was put on the Arabness of the alphabet. The Western world was described as a realm of illumination while the East was seen as a source of darkness. Lastly, as the poetic utterance of Yurdakul exhibits, the Republican reforms and the leadership of Atatürk were perceived in religious terms by comparing the alphabet reform with the inscription of the commandments; an example which further solidifies the existence of a political religion in Republican Turkey.⁵³⁶

According to the new law the use of books printed in the old characters for instruction in schools was forbidden. No books were to be published in the old letters after the end of the year. All correspondence between citizens and government departments would have to be in the new letters from June 1, 1929. Using the new letters became a prerequisite for being elected as a parliament member. From November 12 on, public servants began to take exams on the new alphabet. On December 1, newspapers started to be published with the Latin alphabet. From January 1, 1929, the correspondence in public offices started to be conducted in Latin alphabet but some offices were given further time until June 1929.⁵³⁷

Following the ratification of the alphabet reform, a massive campaign targeting illiteracy was set in motion. After announcing the reform to the public, during a

⁵³⁵ Mehmet Emin Yurdakul (1869-1944) was a nationalist poet and politician. His poetry style was influenced by Turkish “folk” poetry and included a “cleaner” Turkish purged from Arabic and Persian loanwords. As a supporter of the Young Turk movement, he was appointed as the governor of Hejaz and later Sivas provinces. Later he became one of the founders of Turkish Hearths and supported the nationalist cause in Anatolia with his writings and fiery public speeches. Yurdakul served as a parliament after the war. For his artistry and propaganda efforts, see Erol Koroglu, *Ottoman Propaganda and Turkish Identity* (London: Tauris, 2007), pp. 128-196.

⁵³⁶ For the parliamentary speeches and the full text of the regulations on the new alphabet, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre III, Cilt 5, pp. 2-18.

⁵³⁷ Mücteba İlgürel, “Millet Mektepleri.” Münir Aktepe, Mehmet Kaplan & Nejat Göyünç (Eds.) *Doğumunun 100. Yılında Atatürk'e Armağan* (İstanbul: İU Edebiyat Fakültesi Yayınları, 1981), pp. 25-35.

meeting with the public, Atatürk made a fiery speech about the illiteracy problem in Turkey and stated that the “new Turkish alphabet should be learned with all haste. Teach it to every citizen, to every man and woman, to the porters and boatmen. Regard this as a national duty. While performing this duty, remember, eighty per cent of our population do not know how to read and write, this is a shame. Every individual should be ashamed of this fact. This nation is not created to feel ashamed”.⁵³⁸ An important instrument of these sentiments was the special schools, which were called as National Schools (*Millet Mektepleri*). These institutions were established to teach the new alphabet to people aged from 16 to 40. In addition to learning the new letters, students here were taught a variety of courses, ranging from basic calculation, to information on personal hygiene, and civics. The alphabet reform was comprehensive and compulsory for every citizen. For instance prisoners who served their time were only allowed to be released after they proved that they had learnt the new alphabet. Heads of families were responsible for the literacy of their fellow household members. If the head of family knew the new alphabet, it was his or her duty to teach it to the rest of the family, otherwise he or she was responsible of sending them to the national schools. Successful students received a booklet consisting of a photo of Atatürk, his address to the Turkish youth, and the Turkish constitution upon their graduation from national schools.⁵³⁹

The reform and the following literacy campaign was a success for the modernization project of the single-party regime. According to Lewis, the Latin alphabet was “undeniably the best that has ever been used for Turkish, and has played a large part in the rise of literacy; according to the official figures, from 9 per cent in 1924 to 65 per cent in 1975 and 82.3 per cent in 1995”.⁵⁴⁰ Ahmad gives similar numbers to Lewis, and states that in 1927, only 1 out of 10 people was literate in Turkey, in 1945 this ratio climbed to 1 out of 3.⁵⁴¹ Considering the literacy campaign was implemented with a limited budget during the economic crisis of 1930s, these numbers represent a significant increase. Yet, for the single-party regime, the more important aspect of the reform was its connection with the Westernization process. As the speeches at the Grand Assembly summarized, this reform was perceived as a

⁵³⁸ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, p. 272.

⁵³⁹ İlgürel, “Millet Mektepleri.”

⁵⁴⁰ Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform*, p. 37.

⁵⁴¹ Ahmad, *The Making of Modern Turkey*, pp. 100-103.

necessity to change civilizations. The importance of the reform is also visible by observing the backlash it has created. Among the reforms of the era, this one stands out, even today, as the most contested. After the transition to the multi-party regime in 1950, criticisms on the necessity of the alphabet reform were voiced by many, especially conservative political parties and intellectuals, and the issue is still a part of the contemporary political debates. The main points of the criticisms against the reform did not change either. As early as September 1928, journalist İzzet Ulvi Baykurt listed these in an article he wrote for the *Türk Yurdu* magazine.⁵⁴² According to him the main arguments of the opponents of the reforms were that the classics of Turkish literature would be unintelligible to the people, the relations of Turkey with other Muslims and Turks will be severed, the art of Arabic calligraphy would be forgotten and the learned classes, especially the ones who were only exposed to the traditional *madrasah* education, would be illiterates after the ratification of the new legislation. These arguments, especially the one which blames the alphabet change for Turkey's separation from the Muslim civilization, are still used by the critics of the reform. Ironically, Baykurt's answer to these criticisms, which summarize the Republican attitude regarding the modernizing reforms, are also still in use to defend the alphabet reform. According to Baykurt, all of these criticisms were unnecessary because pre-reform Turkish literature did not have many classics in the first place, in fact most of the literature available in Arabo-Persian alphabet were filled with "superstitious beliefs and scholastic thoughts", and therefore people would not miss much by being unable to read them in the future. Regarding the relations with other Muslim countries, Baykurt stated that the Republican reform would set an example for them and predicted that they will, in the future, also change their alphabets, therefore the links between Turkey and other Muslim countries would never be broken. Baykurt proved to be right to some degree, the Turkic speaking countries and political entities such as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Tataristan, too, adopted the Latin alphabet, but Arabic- and Persian-speaking Middle Eastern countries did not change their scripts. Therefore for the younger generations of Turkish citizens, following the intellectual and cultural movements and products of the Western world became in time, much easier than following the Middle East. The abandonment of teaching Arabic and Persian in schools as foreign languages, and the replacement of

⁵⁴² İzzet Ulvi Baykurt, "Yeni Türk Harfleri Münasebetiyle." *Türk Yurdu* (June 1928), pp. 1-3.

these by instruction of English, French or German, further accelerated the process of moving away from the sphere of influence of the Middle Eastern culture. These examples solidify the theory that the main Republican agenda behind the alphabet change was using the reforms as an instrument of Westernization politics. This attitude is most evident at the articles of Republican authors who discussed the outcome of the alphabet reform in 1930s. Sadi Maksudi Arsal claimed in 1930 that with this reform Atatürk “opened up the gates of Western civilization to the Turks”.⁵⁴³ Similarly, Mehmed Fuat Köprülü wrote on the tenth anniversary of the reform, that with the alphabet reform, Turkey has “escaped from the medieval Eastern culture and entered the sphere of influence of the Western culture”.⁵⁴⁴ Therefore, it is more than plausible to claim that the main concern of the regime while implementing the reform was not the practicality or the suitability of the new alphabet. The chief motivation was leaving behind the old, weak, and decaying Eastern civilization, which the regime associated with the Arabo-Persian script, and entering the promising, modern, and enlightened realm of Western civilization.

The alphabet reform and the following literacy campaign can also be read as a part of the educational reforms of the Republic. The concept of education was attributed central importance by the Republican elite as an instrument of change. Education of the masses was perceived as a duty of the regime. Every apparatus of the ruling entity were seen as elements of the educational crusade and every aspect of the social relations, and political and cultural spheres were perceived as candidates to be included in the educational reforms. For instance Atatürk stated during the Second Party Congress of the Republican People’s Party that the main objective of the party was to give “political education” to the people, as if politics, even in its most rudimentary form did not exist in Turkey. Therefore the boundaries of the educational reforms of the single-party were not limited to formal education, but rather the reforms targeted the entire nation and every sphere of life.

The early Republican era witnessed a leap in accessibility of formal education. The budget reserved for education grew drastically every year except the years of global economic crisis. In 1923, Ministry of Education has received 3 million Turkish

⁵⁴³ Arsal, “Latin Harflerini Nicin Kabul Ettik?”, p. 122.

⁵⁴⁴ Fuad Köprülü, “Alfabe Inkilabi.” *Ülkü*, Vol. XII, No. 67 (September 1938), pp. 96-98.

Liras from the budget which would increase to 43 million in 1943.⁵⁴⁵ Also, in this era dramatic improvements in the number of schools, enrolled students and teachers were observed. The combined number of primary, secondary, high schools and universities climbed from 5,005 in 1923 to 11,340 in 1945. In the same time period the number of teachers rose from 12,993 to 27,680 and most importantly the number of enrolled students almost tripled and became more than 1.1 million. The school system was not the only instrument of the educational policies of the Republic. Additionally, in 1932, People's Houses (*Halkevleri*) and, in 1939, People's Chambers (*Halkodaları*), educational institutions that were directly controlled by the single-party were opened across the country and replaced the Turkish Hearths which were closed in 1931, as the most significant "voluntary" social organizations.⁵⁴⁶ According to the party publications, the objective of these institutions was "to keep alive and develop further the movement of reform and social progress in the country".⁵⁴⁷ People's Houses were located at large towns. In every People's House there was a library, a reading room, a conference hall, a radio room, and a performance hall, while the People's Chambers, the smaller versions of the People's Houses, were located at the villages and small towns, and were more compact in size and limited in resources. Both of these institutions were providing an elaborate form of supplementary education and adult education for the masses by building large libraries, staging plays and concerts, and opening exhibitions. With Houses in large towns and Chambers in villages, the masses

⁵⁴⁵ BCA: 30...1.0.0/ 90.559...4.

⁵⁴⁶ On paper, participation to the activities of the People's Houses was voluntary, yet several documents in the Prime Ministerial Archives show that for civil servants, such as teachers, participation was "strongly advised by the government", in fact orders were sent to several ministries to encourage their members to continue participating in the activities of the Houses. See, BCA: No. 13178, File: 14-62, 30...18.1.2/ 30.55...15.

⁵⁴⁷ The information regarding the People's Houses is gathered mainly from a propaganda brochure the regime published in 1942, at the 10th anniversary of the establishment of these institutions and the documents available at the Republican Archives in Ankara. For more information on the Houses, including statistics and illustrated graphics concerning the People's Houses, see the 10th anniversary issue; Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi, (Ed.) *CHP – Halkevleri ve Halkodaları, 1932-1942* (Ankara: Alaeddin Kırıl Basımevi, 1942). For additional information, see Kemal H. Karpat, "The People's Houses in Turkey: Establishment and Growth." *Middle East Journal*, Vol. 17, No. 1/2 (Winter - Spring, 1963), pp. 55-67., and "The Impact of the People's Houses on the Development of Communication in Turkey: 1931-1951." *Die Welt des Islams, New Series*, Vol. 15, Issue 1/4 (1974), pp. 69-84. In recent years, the People's Houses have become a popular subject of research and several monographs focusing on various local branches were published. For some of these, see Eminalp Malkoç, *Devrimin Kültür Fidanlığı - Halkevleri ve Kadıköy Halkevi* (Alef: İstanbul, 2009), Selçuk Duman, *Modern Türkiye'nin İnşasında Halkevleri ve Sivas Halkevi Örneği* (Berikan: İstanbul, 2013) and Feyza Kurnaz Şahin, *Atatürk'ün Kültür Kurumlarından Halkevleri ve Afyon Halkevi* (Berikan: İstanbul, 2015).

that fell outside the formal education system of the state were asked to internalize the modernizing reforms.

The activities performed by the Houses were divided into nine categories and put into the responsibility of different branches. Each People's House had to be involved in activities in at least three of these nine categories. These were: Language and literature, the arts, performances, sports, social work, taught courses, library and publications, Peasantism (*Köycülük*) and, lastly, museums and exhibitions.⁵⁴⁸ The language and literature branches were responsible for organizing conferences. These conferences were either attended by prominent names of Turkish politics and literature, or used to provide a medium of expression for the local talent. These branches also helped the Turkish Linguistic Society by scanning, finding and suggesting words from their respective local vernaculars to replace the foreign loan words in Turkish. The arts divisions of the Houses were responsible for organizing exhibitions of visual arts, staging concerts, and organizing art competitions. Performance branches were in charge of forming volunteer groups to perform stage plays. In the departments related to the arts, both universal and national cultural products were performed. For instance, classical and Turkish music were both performed by the arts branches, and plays from the classic European repertoire, nationalist and educational Turkish plays and traditional Turkish shadow theatre, *Karagöz*, were all produced by the performance branches.⁵⁴⁹

The sports divisions were responsible for the physical education of the citizens who did not get physical education courses in their primary schools or high schools. They also promoted different types of sports which were feasible to do within that respective region and organized sporting competitions with People's Houses of other regions.⁵⁵⁰ The social works divisions of the Houses endorsed "constructive and preventive philanthropy" and according to the party publications reached out to tens of thousands of sick and elderly each year. The taught courses branches were supplementary education institutions helping the Republican formal education system.

⁵⁴⁸ The establishment of the branch of library and publications was compulsory for every People's House. The other branches were established after considering practical concerns.

⁵⁴⁹ For an evaluation of the Performances Branches of the People's Houses, see Eyal Ari, "The People's Houses and the Theatre in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (July 2004), pp. 32-58.

⁵⁵⁰ For instance, for the members of the People's Houses in Sivas and Kayseri, due to their proximity to the snow-capped mountains of Central Anatolia, skiing was promoted as the feasible sport. See BCA: 490..1.0.0/ 5.25...9.

These branches offered various courses depending on the public demand and the means available to the House. Some of these courses were: literacy course for illiterates, elementary natural sciences, vocational training, fine arts, and foreign languages. During the summer months, the Houses also opened summer schools to help the students who failed their courses in the previous school year. The branch of library and publications was the central unit of a People's House. These branches were responsible for publishing books, and classifying and ordering the books sent by the party centre, and ministries, and granted by old libraries of their respective regions and personal collections. The party publications claim that from 1932 to 1942, the People's Houses across the country had more than 420,000 books in their collections. The library units also provided reading material for the mobile libraries, the reading rooms they opened in remote places such as villages, or prisons where access to the House library was not possible.⁵⁵¹ The Peasantist (*Köycü*) divisions within the People's Houses were apparatuses of the Peasantist inclination of the Republican ideology. Synchronous with the almost global proliferation of the importance attributed to the virtues of rural living in 1930s, Republican modernism placed high value on village life while also aiming for the modernization of the village. The Peasantist divisions, working together with the People's Chambers in the villages were responsible for changing the countryside by modernizing it while preserving the rural, pastoral values. According to party publications, another objective of these branches was to create cohesion between the urbanites and the peasants by increasing the mutual sympathy and solidarism they felt for each other. To achieve this intimacy, village tours were organized by the Peasantist branches. These tours were attended by People's Houses members who worked as physicians, veterinary physicians, dentists, teachers, and agriculturists whose professions made them valuable to contribute to the modernization of the villages. The urban groups visiting the villages dealt with the problems of villagers, and gave them instructions and recommendations on a wide range of issues, from village planning to precautions against epidemics, and construction of the village houses.⁵⁵² The last division, museums and history, were

⁵⁵¹ BCA: 490...1.0.0/ 3.11...14.

⁵⁵² Karaömeroğlu states that these visits did not provide much contribution to the problems of villagers and did not manage to close the gap between the urbanites and villagers. For his evaluation of the Peasantism of the People's Houses, see M. Asım Karaömeroğlu, "The People's Houses and the Cult of the Peasant in Turkey." *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 34:4 (October 1998), pp. 67-91.

responsible for studying local history and publishing these studies, as well as exhibiting historical artefacts of their respective regions.

The Republic was proud of the achievements of the People's Houses. On paper, the reach of the Houses and the scope of their activities are apparent from the rather impressive statistics. In a decade, the total number of Houses climbed to 383, in addition to 198 People's Chambers that opened after 1939. Already by 1940 a total of ten million citizens across the country made use of the services at the People's Houses. Together with the regular participants at the People's Chambers the membership figures of the Houses reached 165,000 in 1940.⁵⁵³ In comparison to the 267 centres and 32,000 registered members of the Turkish Hearths, the institutions the People's Houses replaced as the most significant social organization in Turkey, these numbers look impressive indeed. However, the level of penetration of the institutions to people's consciousness is debatable because the social fabric of society did not appear to be changed drastically despite the efforts of the Houses. There are several reasons for this, the most obvious being the fact that the Houses were too closely controlled by the centre which prevented them from becoming entirely localized and being able to gain the trust of the masses. Despite their idealism the Houses were not perceived as integral parts of the communities they represented. According to the documents at the Prime Ministerial Archives, this perception seems to be rightfully deserved. The books in the libraries of the People's Houses were sent by Ankara. The stage plays which the performances divisions were allowed to stage were picked by the capital. The history departments of the Houses were not allowed to publish their own articles without being inspected by the Turkish Historical Society. The Houses were constantly pressured by the government to emphasize certain events and activities. Even regulations on how to clean the Houses were sent from Ankara to the branches. There was no breathing room left to individual Houses to establish close connections with their localities. As the documents demonstrate, the bulk of the membership remained civil servants, teachers, and party members who were devoted to the Republican ideology or were coerced to attend the activities half-heartedly. An example of the alienation these member groups felt when establishing contact with their surroundings is visible in the accounts of Fay Kirby who likened the participants of the Peasantist division of Ankara People's House who prepared for a visit to a

⁵⁵³ *CHP – Halkevleri ve Halkodaları*, p. 16.

nearby village to a group of adventurers equipping themselves for an “African Safari”.⁵⁵⁴

It should be added that despite this alienation, the ruling elite perceived the people of Turkey, whether living in city centres and in rural areas in a very positive light, but did not trust them enough to let them contribute to the citizen-state relations through the instrumentality of the People’s Houses. Similar to the other apparatuses of the Turkish single-party regime such as the media, the public monuments and ceremonies, the Houses remained as a medium of one-way communication between the state and the citizens, without any significant contribution by the citizens themselves. Therefore, the dormancy of the Houses despite all the government support show that in Republican modernization, the state was the motor of change and the people were passive either by choice, by apathy but mostly due to being left without agency. A similar interpretation can be made to evaluate the Republican educational reforms in general; they were enthusiastic and idealist, and aimed for the total transformation of the society by using the medium of education as a modernising device. They were a continuation of the reform attempts and programs of the late-Ottoman Westernizers. In urban centres, in comparison to the rural areas the reforms managed to take hold, but they could not penetrate the social fabric of the rural areas to complete the task of the total transformation of society. The most important reason for this failure was the inability of the ruling elite to adapt themselves to the exceptional conditions of the various Anatolian localities which limited the level of voluntary association of the masses with the modernization agenda. An example which contradicts this generalization is the reforms regarding women’s rights.

Republican Reforms on Women’s Rights

In Republican historiography, the increased social and political rights of the Turkish women constitute one of the major success stories of the Republican modernization of the 1930s although similarly to the situation of the educational reforms, the improvements in women’s rights did not start with the Republican reforms. Despite the fact that developments in this field during the late Ottoman era were not recognized

⁵⁵⁴ Fay Kirby, *The Village Institute Movement in Turkey* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 182-183.

by the Republican elite, the continuity between the late Ottoman and the Republican reform agendas regarding the rights of women is apparent. As a crucial difference between the two eras, the Republican reforms, once again, specifically targeted Turkey's previous identification with Islamicate culture.

Starting from the *Tanzimat* era several improvements were implemented regarding the rights of women, such as the by-law of 1847 which changed the Islamic inheritance law that allotted women half the share of inheritance available to men who have the same degree of relation to the decedent and entitled Ottoman women with equal rights of inheritance. The first secondary school for girls was opened in Istanbul in 1859 and was followed by the establishment of secondary schools in Salonica, Bursa and Beirut. During the Hamidian era the number of these schools rose significantly and from 1880 on high schools for girls were introduced to the school system.⁵⁵⁵ Although these institutions had numerous problems including the low student numbers, the questionable quality of education, and the scarcity of girls' schools across the Empire, their existence signifies that the situation of women in the Empire, especially women who lived in the large cities who had access to these institutions, was not light years behind their counterparts in the Western world. In addition to the proliferation of the educational institutions, the media of the era also contributed to women's rights issues.

In late Ottoman period, concerns over issues such as women's education and social practices that were oppressive to women such as polygamy, arranged marriages, and concubinage, were voiced both by male and female members of the intelligentsia. According to Fleischmann, this proliferation of feminist discourse within the Ottoman Empire was a part of a larger framework of Middle Eastern feminism. As early as 1895 the first women's magazine was published in Ottoman Empire which was called *Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete* (The Ladies Own Gazette).⁵⁵⁶ Famous names of the

⁵⁵⁵ Şefika Kurnaz, *Cumhuriyet Öncesinde Türk Kadını, 1839-1923* (Ankara: Başbakanlık Aile Araştırma Kurumu Yayınları, 1991), pp. 4-28.

⁵⁵⁶ There were other publications predating the Ladies Own Gazette such as *Kypseli* (published in Greek, 1845) and *Gitar* (published in Armenian, 1862) but most of these magazines folded after a short run without leaving much impact while Ladies Own Gazette managed to exist for fourteen years. According to Frierson, the magazine also published its own auxiliary for girls and a separate gazette for children, and was financially successful enough to found its own press. For more information see, Elizabeth B. Frierson, "Women in the Late Ottoman Intellectual History." Elizabeth Özdalga (Ed.), *Late Ottoman Society* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 137-153. For selected articles from the magazine, see Mustafa Çiçekler & Fatih Andi (Eds.), *Yeni Harflerle Hanımlara Mahsus Gazete, 1895-1908* (Istanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009).

Ottoman women's rights movement, such as Fatma Aliye who is commonly recognized as the first female Turkish novelist, contributed articles to the magazine. According to Frierson, the magazine campaigned for the education of women without disregarding their "traditional" obligations as mothers, wives and loyal Ottoman subjects.⁵⁵⁷ The Ladies Own Gazette offered Ottoman women a mixture of serious texts on women's rights, valuable information on diverse issues such as childrearing, nutrition and disease prevention, and light entertainment. The magazine was published twice weekly and circulated not just in the Ottoman lands but among the Turkish speaking populations of Russia, as well.⁵⁵⁸ With the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, the women's rights movement in the Ottoman Empire gained further momentum but the reform programme implemented during the Second Constitutional Era did not satisfy the demands of women. Although they were a part of the work-force for a long time and managed to find employment in public service and various other fields after the Revolution, such as telegraph operators, nurses, and postal clerks, they still were paid much lower than men and their social and political rights were still not recognised. In 1913, The World of the Women (*Kadınlar Dünyası*), an influential feminist newspaper, started publication. This journal, which was entirely run by women, closely followed the international feminist movement while remaining very loyal to Ottoman identity, defended the rights of the Ottoman women – regardless of their religious and ethnic affiliation – and campaigned for women's rights, along with its sister organization Ottoman Society for the Defence of Women's Rights (*Osmanlı Müdafaa-i Hukuk-ı Nisvan Cemiyeti*).⁵⁵⁹ This group was just one of the dozens of women's organizations which operated in countless fields, ranging from contributing to the war effort to increasing the knowledge of the Ottoman women, from philanthropy to providing vocational training for women. As with the modernizers of the late Ottoman era, the members of the Ottoman women's rights movement belonged to a variety of groups regarding their perception of Islamic identity. Some of them, like Fatma Aliye, attributed special importance to the Islamic identity and while

⁵⁵⁷ Elizabeth B. Frierson, "Gender, Consumption and Patriotism: The Emergence of an Ottoman Public Sphere." Armando Salvatore & Dale F. Eickelman (Eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), p. 106.

⁵⁵⁸ Fleischmann, "The 'Other Awakening'", p. 101.

⁵⁵⁹ For an evaluation of this newspaper, see Serpil Çakır, *Osmanlı Kadın Hareketi* (Istanbul: Metis, 1993). Recently the entire catalogue of the newspaper was re-published in Latin script. See, Fatma Büyükkarcı Yılmaz & Tülay Gençtürk Demircioğlu (Eds.), *Kadınlar Dünyası – Yeni Harflerle, 1913-1921* (Istanbul: Kadın Eserleri Kütüphanesi ve Bilgi Merkezi Vakfı, 2009).

applauding the political activities of their sister feminist organizations in the West, criticized them for their scandalous behaviour and asked Ottoman women to continue behaving like proper ladies and retain their traditional roles in the family while simultaneously seeking education and knowledge. Other feminists, like Fatma Aliye's sister Emine Semiye, who was active in the field of politics as a member of the Ottoman Democrats (*Fırka-i İbad*) , indicated that some women of the era steadily crossed over the traditional lines that separated women from the men in the social and political spheres. Regardless of their nature, the activities of the women's rights organizations and the feminist publications of the era show that the Republican perception of the situation of women in the Ottoman Empire, as a form of slavery bereft of agency, was far from being true.

An example given by Karakışla further illustrates this point. During the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913, due to many positions left open by the conscripted male population of the Empire, women started to participate more in economic life which drastically increased their visibility in the society. In 1913, an Istanbulite woman named Ayşe Bedra Osman applied to an open position at the Istanbul Telephone Company (*Dersaadet Telefon Anonim Şirket-i Osmaniyesi*). The recruitment policy of the Company favoured non-Muslim women over Muslims and therefore they did not employ Ayşe Bedra Osman. The World of the Women and Defence of Women's Rights launched a campaign to pressure the Company to change its recruitment policy that ended with a victory, and not just for Osman, but also for seven Muslim women in total who were employed by the Istanbul Telephone Company in 1914.⁵⁶⁰ This example further supports the assumption that an independent, and functioning women's rights movement indeed existed in the late Ottoman era which was powerful enough to sway public opinion to support their agenda. Therefore the Republican reformers did not find a *tabula rasa* regarding the women's rights when they took over the administration, but rather inherited the legacy of a combination of state reforms from *Tanzimat*, Hamidian and Second Constitutional Eras, and a rich, organic yet internationally connected, and capable feminist movement.

In between the collapse of the Ottoman order at the end of the First World War and the establishment of the Republic, women came to the fore once again. Their

⁵⁶⁰ Yavuz Selim Karakışla, *Osmanlı Kadın Telefon Memureleri, 1913-1923* (Istanbul: Akıl Fikir Yayınları, 2015).

contribution to the war effort during the Turkish War of Independence was praised by the Republican elite, including Mustafa Kemal Atatürk himself, who in a meeting with the women of Konya province in March 1923, stated that “no other women of a nation could claim that they worked as much as the women of Anatolia to grant their nation’s emancipation and victory”.⁵⁶¹ Atatürk further stated that to establish a civilized society the education of women was a necessity, but from his tone in this speech, as well as his other speeches about the women’s rights issue from this era, it is apparent that he closely followed the rhetoric of the late Ottoman era feminism and emphasized the importance of women’s education, their crucial duty as child-rearers, and the importance of the perfection and the exhibition of womanly virtues. According to the speeches of Atatürk and the lack of any substantial legal reform on this matter, women’s participation in the workforce and in politics seems not to be a part of the Republican reform agenda during the very first years of the Republic. In April 1923, the new law on the parliamentary elections only granted the right to vote to the male population of the country. During the discussions of this law, only one parliament member, Hilmi Bey⁵⁶² proposed the expansion of the law to grant women the right to vote, or at least their inclusion in the population census which would be conducted to determine the amount of deputies that represent the constituencies. His speech created a ruckus at the Grand Assembly which ended with angry parliament members shouting at him and stomping their feet to prevent Hilmi Bey from continuing his speech.⁵⁶³ The intolerance shown to the sole supporter of the women’s cause in parliament signifies that the women’s rights movement in Republican Turkey had not many supporters among the members of the ruling elite. An example of this reluctance is also visible in the case of the proposed feminist political party.

In July 1923, feminists in Turkey, although modest in number, showed their level of political awareness and ideological consciousness by proposing to establish a feminist political party under the name of the People’s Party of Women (*Kadınlar*

⁵⁶¹ Atatürk, *Söylev ve Demeçleri III*, pp. 151-157.

⁵⁶² (Tunalı) Hilmi Bey (1871-1928) was a politician who served as a parliament member at the last Ottoman Parliament and at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey from 1920 to 1928. Due to his opposition to Abdülhamid II, he escaped to Switzerland in 1895 to avoid persecution and remained in exile until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Tunalı Hilmi Bey was one the most active parliament members at the Grand Assembly and was known for his support for women’s rights. Due to his birthplace in Ottoman Bulgaria on the banks of River Danube, he was known as *Tunalı Hilmi* (Hilmi the Danubian).

⁵⁶³ *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre I, Cilt 28, p. 341.

Halk Fırkası). Considering that the First Group in the Grand Assembly led by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk would be officially established only in September 1923, the People's Party of Women was on the verge of being the first political party of the young Republic. The government did not accept this appeal on the grounds that women were not legally allowed to participate in politics although it did give the green light for the formation of a civil society organization. Instead of a party, the Turkish Women's Union (*Türk Kadınlar Birliği*) was established in February 1924. The Union remained active in pursuing political rights for women and in 1925 even planned a campaign to nominate the well-known female figures of the era, such as the leader of the Union Nezihe Muhiddin and the famous author Halide Edip, as parliamentary candidates in the forthcoming 1927 elections, but this proposal was also refused by the ruling party on the same grounds. According to Zihinoğlu, to circumnavigate their obstacle the Union contemplated for a while sending a feminist man to the Parliament to defend the feminist women's cause and raise awareness for the plight of the Turkish women's rights movement to be represented in the political sphere.⁵⁶⁴

While the efforts of the Union regarding the political representation of women failed, the social rights of women were recognized by the regime. Especially after 1925, the watershed moment of the end of the opposition, the ruling party became bolder in performing more drastic reforms. Some of these reforms directly changed the social status of women. The first substantial reform package on women's rights came in the form of the new civil code in 1926. During the discussions of the code in the Grand Assembly, Şükrü Kaya, the Minister of the Interior, praised the law for giving back to Turkish women "the rights they truly deserved for their self-sacrifice and virtues they have shown for centuries". The new civil code was ratified by unanimous vote on February 17, 1926.⁵⁶⁵ As Kaya and several fellow parliament members stated during the debates, the most significant improvements were in the rights of women. The code officially ended polygamy, guaranteed their right to work and abolished the Islamic practices which did not accept the equality between the sexes in regards of testimony and divorce. In Islamic law the testimony of a woman was worth half of a man. According to various hadith collections this was due to the deficiency in their intelligence in comparison with men. Divorce procedures in Islam

⁵⁶⁴ Zihinoğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap*, pp. 100-110.

⁵⁶⁵ For the debates at the Grand Assembly, and for the full text of the civil code of 1926, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 22, pp. 229-237 and the attached file, pp. 1-102.

also favoured men; for men divorce is easily obtained, while obtaining divorce for women was typically quite difficult. The civil code made significant corrections relating to these matters. Its contribution surpassed any previous arrangements made on the woman issue.

In March 1927, The Turkish Women's Union held a congress in Istanbul. Here, Nezihe Muhiddin once again voiced the plea of Turkish women for political representation. The following incidents showed that the women's rights movements were ahead of the Republican elite regarding the reforms and this conflict of interests concerning the pace of the reforms made the regime uncomfortable. In September 1927, police raided the headquarters of the Women's Union on the premise of administrative infraction. Muhiddin and the leading cadre of the movement were forced to resign from their duties. According to Zihinoğlu, a more regime-friendly and tame administration took over after this intervention which she perceives as politically motivated. Simultaneously, in this era the Union was first acknowledged as a "public benefit society" and later as a state-sponsored organization.⁵⁶⁶ The chief duty of the Women's Union became representing Turkey and its modernising reforms in the international arena. In 1929, Union member Efzaiş Suat attended the annual Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship held in Berlin.⁵⁶⁷ Furthermore, it was decided to organize the next meeting in Istanbul. This arrangement provided the regime another opportunity to show the world Turkey's changing, modern exterior under Republican rule.

In 1930, Turkish women finally managed to gain the right to vote and to be elected, at last at the municipal level. On April 14, 1930, a large crowd of Women's Union members gathered in Taksim Square in front of the Monument of the Republic to express their gratitude.⁵⁶⁸ In December 1934, the persistent calls for women's enfranchisement of the feminist movement and the increasingly modernist agenda of the ruling party finally converged, and the women of Turkey gained the right to vote and to be elected in parliamentary elections. Although the fact that the elections would not be competitive until 1946 surely reduces the importance of the reform, it was still a significant moment in Turkish history. Furthermore, in this era the Republic tried to

⁵⁶⁶ BCA: Folder 80-11, 30..18.1.1/ 14.42...6.

⁵⁶⁷ BCA: File 4104, 30...10.0.0/ 229.541...5.

⁵⁶⁸ BCA: 30...10.0.0 /80.526..4.

make women more visible in the social sphere. There was a substantial increase regarding the number of female students since all faculties of all universities were opened to women. It is impossible to deny the Republican efforts to make education more available and accessible to women.⁵⁶⁹ The quality of the Republican education is open to debate, but a crucial aspect of the single-party education system was the vital importance attributed to gender related issues in the curricula such as gender equality and women's participation in the work force. Gümüšoğlu's comparative analysis of the primary school textbooks of the single-party era and the multi-party democracy after 1945 clearly demonstrates that the educational mentality of the single-party period was more concerned with the equality of gender, and placed more emphasis on the visibility of women in business life and social life.⁵⁷⁰ It is staggering how the Turkish ruling elite moved from stomping their feet on the ground in anger to protest a single parliament member who defended the existence of Turkish women in 1923 to embracing gender equality and the political enfranchisement of women in early 1930s. Therefore an analysis of the Republican rhetoric regarding this issue is needed.

To prevent a conservative backlash, a significant part of the discourse utilized by the Republican elite in regards to women's rights was finding, or inventing, examples from the pre-Islamic past of the Turkish nation to prove that equality between the sexes was ingrained in the very fabric of Turkishness. For instance, Sadri Maksudi Arsal, who spoke in favour of the enfranchisement of the women in the Grand Assembly, stated that "Turkish women always participated in the political sphere". Arsal then moved on to give examples from pre-Islamic Turkish history to buttress his claim. He asserted that the Khanate of Bukhara which was overrun by Arabs in the 7th century was led by a woman. Arsal further claimed that the wives or mothers of Turkish rulers, such as Bilge Khagan's mother in the 6th century and a wife of a Uyghur ruler in the 10th century, were helping the men in administrative matters.⁵⁷¹ This rather flimsy "evidence" was produced and repeated in abundance by the ruling elite to fulfil two interrelated objectives. First, as mentioned before, the Republicans tried to prevent a conservative backlash by presenting the empowerment of women as consonant with

⁵⁶⁹ Zafer Toprak, "*Kadınsız İnkılap: Nezihe Muhiddin, Kadınlar Halk Fırkası, Kadın Birliği*", Presentation given in Istanbul, 2009.

⁵⁷⁰ Firdevs Gümüšoğlu, *Ders Kitaplarında Toplumsal Cinsiyet (1928-2013)* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 1996).

⁵⁷¹ T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi. Devre IV, Cilt 25, p. 84.

Turkish traditions. Secondly, the blame was once again put on the Islamic past. According to Republican perspective, Turks were already modern and civilized from time immemorial until Islam intervened. Thus, the Republican regime, by removing the remnants of the Islamic past through a series of modernizing reforms was freeing the Turkish women. Therefore, the Republican perception of the women's rights issue was firmly linked with the overarching theme, the leitmotif of Republican ideology, modernizing by the elimination of the obstacles established by the values and traditions of the past, specifically the Islamic, "eastern" past.

In 1935, in the first elections following the enfranchisement of women, eighteen women were elected to the parliament of 400 seats. This ratio of female parliamentary representation would only be surpassed after the 2007 elections.⁵⁷² Ironically, the conclusion of the women question in line with the Republican ideology led to the disintegration of the organic Turkish Feminist movement that had existed in various forms continuously from the 1880s to the 1930s. On April 18, 1935, the Turkish Women's Union hosted the 12th Annual Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship held in Istanbul. The event was a success that proved to be an essential publicity opportunity for modern Turkey. Following the congress the Women's Union which already had lost its radical reformist edge, was closed by the government on the grounds that it had "completed its task".⁵⁷³ At the time of its closure, the Union was organised in four large cities and had 1,000 registered members.

The case of the Turkish Women's Union constitutes a rarity in the early Republican history. For the previously mentioned reforms, the contribution of the ordinary people to the decision-making process and the implementation of the reforms was minimal. The motor of the change was the Republican elite which tried to drag the rest of the society along, to make them internalize the reforms such as the abolition of the caliphate, the Sufi religious orders or the change of alphabets. There was no significant public demand for these reforms. On the contrary, with the reforms on women's rights, it was the Republican elite that was one step behind the public demands. The organic feminist movement of Turkey which had already existed for

⁵⁷² Ayşe Saktanber, "Kemalist Kadın Hakları Söylemi." Ahmet İnel (ed.), *Modern Türkiye'de Siyasi Düşünce – Cilt 2: Kemalizm* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2001), p. 326.

⁵⁷³ For more information on the journey of the Turkish Women's Union see Zihinoğlu, *Kadınsız İnkılap*; and Saktanber, "Kemalist Kadın Hakları Söylemi."

decades had to wait for eleven years to gain the right of political representation in Turkey. Furthermore, similarly to the other voluntary organizations of the era, they were forced to close down because “they achieved everything that they wished for” which contradicts the ideological inclinations of a proudly modernist Republic. The motive that I have proposed in the previous chapter to explain this rather unusual behaviour was the intolerance of the Republican regime towards every single form of collective display of loyalty to religion, ethnicity, gender, ideology or class. The Republican political religion discouraged voluntary social organizations, restricted religious beliefs, political opinions, different forms of belongingness to ethnic and linguistic backgrounds, gender or social class and restrained the formation of collective identities to a domain limited within the state, and did not give them any room to thrive. Therefore feminism, a form of supranational identity, must have been frowned upon by the ruling elite. Zafer Toprak reminds us that the Turkish Women’s Union was abolished right after the 12th Congress of the International Alliance of Women for Suffrage and Equal Citizenship held in Istanbul in 1935 and suggests that the reason of the demise of the organization may have been the anti-militaristic, anti-war discourse of the International Alliance of Women (IAW).⁵⁷⁴ Considering that 1935 was an especially turbulent year in the world in which Italy was on the verge of attacking Abyssinia, Spain was in turmoil which would end in civil war, and Germany violated several provisions of the Treaty of Versailles by introducing military conscription and rebuilding the armed forces, showing solidarity with an international organization such as IAW which persistently addressed issues such as peace and the proliferation of arms in Europe could have been perceived as problematic by the Republican elite. It is plausible to state that with the closure of the Turkish Women’s Union the regime tried to distance itself from the IAW but the more plausible explanation is that the Republican regime wanted to dictate an identity to the women of Turkey which refused to let them become a part of the global womankind, and to show solidarity with the pleas of their fellow feminists. The Turkish feminist women should limit their identities within the boundaries of Turkishness, because claiming an additional identity whether local or ethnic, gender-based or internationalist, was forbidden in Republican Turkey.

⁵⁷⁴ Toprak, “*Kadınsız İnkılap*”, 2009.

Modernization, Dersim and Nationalist Historiographies

As stated above, in Republican modernization, the reforms were implemented as state projects while the contribution of the masses were kept to a minimum. The modernization project of the Republic showed similarities with the reform projects of the previous leaderships while simultaneously differentiating from them due to the hostile attitude towards the cultural, political, and social reflections of the Islamic past in Turkey. The Republican reforms continued the tradition of the *Tanzimat*, Hamidian and Second Constitutional eras, but a special emphasis was placed on secularisation and total disengagement from the traditions, organizations, and institutions which the Republican ruling elite associated with the Islamicate and Eastern cultures. The Republican ideology was centred around the concept of modernization as well as on the intolerance shown towards other identities except the national, modern, secular Turkish identity which had been carefully structured by the Republican elite starting with the establishment of the single-party rule in 1925. This identity was represented by the Turkish nation-state which was revered by the Republicans almost to the point of adoration. It was seen as the pinnacle of modernity, and a strong, centralized state with working apparatuses that efficiently penetrated every sphere of life was seen as the perfect tool to spread modernization. This tendency was best defined by the parliament member and Republican ideologue Sadri Maksudi Arsal who described the state as the “most effective and most important institution for the development of civilization”.⁵⁷⁵ For citizens, identification with this state was a necessity. Every sense of belongingness felt to sources other than the nation state, such as Sufi religious orders, different ideologies, Masonic lodges, ethnic groups, labour organizations and internationalist movements, were all deemed harmful stumbling blocks preventing modernization. To build a monolithic nation-state was not just an aim of the Republican elite but a tool needed for the realization of the modernization project.

In hindsight this project proved to be open to abuse like every other endeavour attempted by the unchecked, leviathan power of the state where the contribution and active participation of the masses were discouraged and political discussions were restricted. The unaccountability of the ruling elite produced arbitrariness which can always lead to disastrous consequences. In Republican Turkey, the disaster struck

⁵⁷⁵ Arsal, Presentation given at the Second Congress of Turkish History, 1937.

Dersim, a region in Eastern Anatolia where more than thirteen thousand civilians were killed by the state forces during a two-year campaign (1937-1938) which, according to Prime Minister İsmet İnönü, was waged to “open up the region to civilization”.⁵⁷⁶ These events were at first presented by the regime as a rightful exercise of power to deal with a harmful revolt staged by the reactionary forces against the modernization attempts of the government, then for the following decades the graveness of the situation was downplayed by successive governments of Turkey. Recently, the issue began to be debated openly but the theories about the motives of both parties involved in the incidents are misleading, fed with nationalist propaganda and therefore insufficient to inform us about the nature of Turkish authoritarianism. The following part of the chapter will first briefly introduce the characteristics of the Dersim region while discussing the most prevalent interpretations of the events of 1937-1938. This section will be followed by a narrative of the events based on the documents from the Prime Ministerial Archives and show the connections between Republican modernization and the Dersim massacres.

Dersim is located in eastern Turkey neighbouring the towns of Elazığ, Erzincan and Bingöl. Dersim is mountainous; the average altitude is around 2,000 metres, and the area is rich with various fresh water sources and forests which led to its description as an oasis placed in the heart of the Eastern Anatolia, a region that mostly associated with its harsh climate and desolateness. In particular, the Munzur Valley, which is located in the Munzur Mountain Range and hosts the largest national park of Turkey, accommodates very rich fauna and flora which are distinct from the rest of the region. The Munzur Mountain range, forming an arc, covers the entire north-western, northern and north-eastern flanks of Dersim and cuts off the city from the rest of the North-eastern Anatolia. Together with the Euphrates which determines the southern border of the city, natural features encircle Dersim and make it possible for an entirely distinct culture to flourish here which is almost impossible to simplify solely on ethnic, linguistic, or religious lines. The physical separation from the rest of the region resulted in the establishment of a tribal society, a different language, a distinct culture and an extremely eclectic belief system. The people of Dersim were

⁵⁷⁶ Prime Minister İsmet İnönü’s speech at the Grand Assembly, June 14, 1937. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 19, p. 315.

and still are a minority, in fact they can even be described as a minority within a minority, in the ethnic, denominational, and linguistic spheres.

The majority of the social scientists who deal with the Dersim Massacres consider the incidents of 1937-1938 as a part of the on-going “Kurdish Question” in Turkey, and the Middle Eastern region. They base this assumption on the ethnic identity of the Dersimis although it is questionable if the primary identification of the Dersimis is an ethnic one. The people of Dersim are known as ethnic Zazas. For most, the Zazas constitute a branch of Kurdish people, therefore for these observers, the events in Dersim are perceived as a segment in the “chain of Kurdish revolts” that regularly broke out in the region first against the Ottoman Empire and later against the Republican regime.⁵⁷⁷ The most important and widespread of these revolts was the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925. The significant amount of effort, time and funds spent on crushing the revolt troubled the leading figures of the republic. This revolt can also be read as a watershed moment in Turkish history because the following Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükun Kanunu*) eliminated the nascent political opposition against the Republican People’s Party and paved the way for the establishment of the single-party regime in Turkey. Yet, the classification of the Sheikh Said rebellion as a Kurdish nationalist uprising is debatable because it can also be decoded as a reactionary revolt against the modernization attempts of the government, especially as a backlash against the abolition of the Caliphate and the Sufi religious orders. The leader of the rebellion, Sheikh Said, himself was a leading member of the *Nakshbandiyya* Sufi order. According to Ali Fethi Okyar, the Prime Minister of the era, the documents found in the possession of the rebels showed that the only objective of the rebellion was “reinstating Sharia law”.⁵⁷⁸ Yet, even he who had inside information on the events did not rule out the probability of the utilization of a form of Kurdish nationalist discourse by the rebels to widen their base of support. Furthermore, since religious creeds can also contribute immensely to the creation of

⁵⁷⁷ For a typical work which describes Dersim Massacres as a “Kurdish rebellion” and a part of a chain of Kurdish revolts see Robert W. Olson, “The Kurdish Rebellions of Sheikh Said (1925), Mt. Ararat (1930), and Dersim (1937-8): Their Impact on the Development of the Turkish Air Force and on Kurdish and Turkish Nationalism”. *Die Welt des Islams*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (2000), pp. 67-94.

⁵⁷⁷ Prime Minister Ali Fethi Okyar’s speech as the Grand Assembly, February 25, 19925. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre II, Cilt 14, p. 307.

⁵⁷⁷ For sources which claimed that the Sheikh Said Revolt of 1925 was a Kurdish nationalist revolt, see Oran, *Türk Dış Politikası*, p. 266, and Van Bruinessen, *Agha, Shaik and State*, pp. 265-299.

national identities, it is almost impossible to isolate the real motive of the rebellion.⁵⁷⁹ Nevertheless, even if we accept that a Kurdish nationalism existed in the region in 1920s and 1930s, the connection of this movement with the incidents in Dersim is rather feeble. To demonstrate this claim, we have to briefly discuss the story of Kurdish nationalism during the early Republican era.

According to Oran, Kurdish nationalism is a form of negative nationalism because it started to develop as a reaction against the increasingly ethnic tendencies of Turkish nationalism, especially during the era dominated by the Committee of Union and Progress, the group that organized the Young Turk Revolution in 1908 which ushered in the Second Constitutional Era and later became the ruling party of the Ottoman Empire in 1913. Oran states that the first Kurdish nationalist ideologues only noticed and then embraced their Kurdishness after encountering the nationalist discourses of the eminent Turkish nationalists of the Second Constitutional Era, such as Ziya Gökalp and Hamdullah Suphi Tanrıöver. Later, this nationalist nucleus expanded during the single-party rule of CUP, but this expansion came to a halt with the establishment of the national struggle in Anatolia at the end of the First World War. According to Oran, during the Turkish War of Independence the majority of Kurds supported the joint cause of Anatolian Muslims against the Allied invasion.⁵⁸⁰ Similarly Kirişçi and Winrow state that this coalition between the Kurds and the Republican elite remained strong during the early years of the Republic and the majority of the Kurds favoured a peaceful co-existence with the Turks. For example, when the Sheikh Said Revolt broke out in 1925, many Kurdish tribes offered the government their help to crush the revolt. Therefore, according to Kirişçi and Winrow the nationalist conscience among the Kurds was established only after the intensification of the Turkish ethnic nationalism of the Republican ruling elite during the 1930s.⁵⁸¹ Another factor which contributed to the national awakening of the Kurds is attributed to the disproportionate amount of force used by the Republican government when dealing with insurgencies in the areas predominantly populated by Kurds. According to Yıldız, “these vulgar displays of power” resulted in the deepening

⁵⁸⁰ Baskın Oran, “Kürt Milliyetçiliğinin Diyalektiği.” Tanıl Bora (Ed.), *Modern Türkiye’de Siyasi Düşünce - Cilt 4: Milliyetçilik* (İstanbul: İletişim, 2002), pp. 871-876.

⁵⁸¹ Kirişçi & Winrow, *The Kurdish Question and Turkey*, pp. 109-110.

of the gap between the state and the Kurds.⁵⁸² In summary, a combination of these factors made Kurdish nationalism a reality in the region and contributed to the escalation of tensions between the government and the Kurds who defined themselves with their nationalist identities. Eventually, after the 1980s, Kurdish nationalist identity and ideology transformed into being massively popular among the Kurds of Turkey.

Several social scientists suggested that the Kurdish ethnicity of the people of the region played a crucial role in the Dersim massacres. For the supporters of this view, this was an attempted genocide or ethnocide to wipe out all of the Kurdish population of the region. The impetus for the massacres was the ultra-nationalist ideology of the Republic which sought to create an ethnically homogenous Turkey. For instance İsmail Beşikçi considers the massacres in Dersim as a “genocide directed towards Kurdishness”.⁵⁸³ Martin van Bruinessen’s conclusion is slightly different, as he claims that the regime did not aim to exterminate the entire Kurdish population of Turkey but targeted the destruction of Kurdish ethnic identity, and therefore he suggests that the term “ethnocide” would better fit to this case.⁵⁸⁴ Whether calling it a genocide or ethnocide, claiming that the Dersim campaigns were organized to target the perceived Kurdishness of Dersim is widespread among the modern Kurdish nationalists as well. Ironically, Turkish nationalists also contribute to this perception by claiming that the events in Dersim were part of the several “Kurdish nationalist revolts”. Examples of this trend in Turkish nationalist discourse can be found in the works of diplomat and author Bilâl N. Şimşir who stated that the violence in the region started as a Kurdish Rebellion similar to the Sheikh Said Revolt and nationalist

⁵⁸² Yıldız, p. 232.

⁵⁸³ İsmail Beşikçi, *Tunceli Kanunu ve Dersim Jenosidi* (İstanbul: Belge, 1990). As an interesting side note, before Beşikçi became the foremost Turkish supporter of Kurdish independence, he was considering the incidents in Dersim as a part of the chain of rebellions in Eastern Anatolia which were perpetuated by the Kurds with the support of the imperialism to carve themselves an independent state. He also stated that the leaders of these rebellions were tribe leaders who exploited the religious values of the people. For more information, see İsmail Beşikçi, "Doğu Anadolu'da Sosyal ve Siyasal Değişim." *Prof. Dr. Yavuz Abadan'a Armağan* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi SBF Yayınları, 1969), pp. 403-440.

⁵⁸⁴ Martin Van Bruinessen, "Genocide in Kurdistan? The Suppression of the Dersim Rebellion in Turkey (1937-38) and the Chemical War against the Iraqi Kurds (1988)." George J. Andreopoulos (Ed.), *Conceptual and Historical Dimensions of Genocide* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), pp. 141-170.

journalist Uğur Mumcu who defined the events as the “eighteenth Kurdish uprising”.⁵⁸⁵

Regardless of the ethnicity of its supporters, these theories have several problems. First of all, these “researches” rarely use primary sources. Apart from Beşikçi’s short study of the massacres which consists mostly of texts of laws regarding Dersim, most books on the subject are derivative. For instance, Bruinessen’s article uses a few reports about the events penned by the British diplomats in Turkey, but most of his narrative of the massacres was taken from secondary sources, specifically from Kurdish nationalist Nuri Dersimi’s memoirs. Similarly, in Plaggenborg’s book on the Republican history, Bruinessen’s narrative is repeated. Although these authors manage to remain critical of their sources, this trend of repeating the same secondary sources, especially written by Kurdish and Turkish nationalists, leads to the regurgitation of the same material, without questioning the real nature of the event. Secondly, the Kurdishness of the region is a problematic assumption on its own. The debate on the Kurdishness of Zazas is too large of a subject to be discussed here in detail but one can spot that, as in the contemporary setting, on one side there is the larger Kurdish nationalist movement which consider the Zaza people as a sub-branch of the Kurds despite the definite linguistic and, in some cases, religious differences between these identities,⁵⁸⁶ and on the other side there is the newly emerging Zaza consciousness, promoted especially by the members of the Zaza diaspora living in Europe who consider Zaza identity as distinct. In fact, an even smaller sub-branch of the latter group defines the Dersimi culture as a micro-culture of its own, separate from both Kurdish and Zaza identities. A fourth alternative voiced by some Turkish commentators in 1980s, holding that Zazas are an essentially Turkic nation that was “Persianized” in religion, language and culture due to the Zaza populated regions’ close proximity to Iran, has already been relegated to obscurity.⁵⁸⁷ For the supporters

⁵⁸⁵ Bilâl N. Şimşir, *İngiliz Belgeleriyle Türkiye’de Kürt Sorunu (1924-1938): Şeyh Sait, Ağrı, ve Dersim Ayaklanmaları* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1991) and See Uğur Mumcu, “19. Ayaklanma.” *Milliyet*, March 25, 1992.

⁵⁸⁶ Zaza people belong at least to three different religious denominations: Alevi, Sunni (Shafi) and Sunni (Hanafi).

⁵⁸⁷ For the essential work of this approach, see Hayri Başbuğ, *İki Türk Boyu: Zaza ve Kurmanclar* (Ankara: Türk Kültürü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1984). According to Van Bruinessen, Institute for the Study of Turkish Culture, the publishing house which released this booklet was established and run by retired military officers after the military coup of 1980 to wage an ideological campaign against the nascent Kurdish nationalist movement “in the form of a series of booklets that reasserted the old claim of the Kurds’ Turkish origins.” For more information, see Martin Van Bruinessen, “Review of Mehmed S.

of the first theory, the identity of the Dersimis is imagined on ethno-political lines. Some of these proponents also criticize the supporters of separate Zaza or Dersimi identities and claim that the division between these are manufactured by Turkish nationalism to prevent the emergence of a monolithic Kurdish nationalist awareness. For instance for author Munzur Cem, the idea of Zazas being a different ethnicity from Kurds was endorsed after 1980s by the Turkish state to divide the larger Kurdish nationalist movement.⁵⁸⁸ Similarly, Mehmed S. Kaya defined the Zaza people as “Zaza Kurds” and claimed that during his fieldwork in the Eastern Anatolian town of Solhan, the Zazas living there stated that they had never even considered themselves anything other than Kurds and that they regard the Zaza/Kurdish division as a Turkish ploy.⁵⁸⁹ It is plausible to think that these claims that equate favouring a distinct Zaza identity with being pawns of the Turkish nationalist plots aiming to divide the Kurdish consciousness could have contributed to the ostracization of the supporters of these theories from the larger Kurdish community. Therefore it is fair to say that both Kurdish and Turkish nationalism actively sought to reshape the Zaza identity according to their ideologies.

Dersimi identity is much more elaborate than being definable solely with Zaza ethnicity. Even if we agree with the widely accepted thesis and consider Zazas as Kurds, there is no proof on how Dersimis were related to the newly emerging modern Kurdish identity and Kurdish nationalism of 1930s. As mentioned above, Dersimis were a minority in every possible sense of the word and their language and belief system also greatly differed from the rest of the region which made their belongingness to the Kurdish nationalist consciousness of the era rather implausible. Dersimi people speak *Dimili*⁵⁹⁰, a language from the North-Western group of the Iranian branch of the Indo-European language family. It is distinct enough from Kurdish to be called an entirely different language, while some linguists and Kurdish nationalists continue to classify it as a sub-dialect of Kurdish. This division is highly political and ignites debates within Dersim and the larger Kurdish community. Dimili and Kurmanji Kurdish, which are spoken by the majority of the Kurds of Turkey, are not mutually

Kaya, *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey: A Middle Eastern Minority in a Globalised Society* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).” *Kurdish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (2015), pp. 118-121.

⁵⁸⁸ Munzur Cem, “Zazalar Kürttür!” Article in *Zazaki.net*, August 2009.

⁵⁸⁹ Mehmed S. Kaya, *The Zaza Kurds of Turkey* (New York: IB Tauris, 2011), pp. 3-5.

⁵⁹⁰ It is also called *Zazaki*, *Kirmandjki* (or *Kirmanci*) or simply *zone ma* (which mean “our language”).

intelligible. According to Ludwig Paul, Dimili is genealogically not a very close relative of Kurdish, and both historical morphology and phonology detached Kurdish from Dimili.⁵⁹¹ These findings support the thesis that these two are entirely different languages which belong to the same language family. According to Daimi Cengiz, “world-famous linguists such as David Neil MacKenzie, Karl Hadank, Oskar Mann, and Jost Gippert argue that Dimili is a language of its own” while social scientists such as Beşikçi and Cem still consider it as a subdivision within Kurdish.⁵⁹² Similarly to the revisionist claims on the Turkishness of Zazas, in the 1980s propaganda booklets were published which claimed that Dimili is a Turkic language but this theory was not able to leave any mark on the field.⁵⁹³

Most importantly, in addition to the linguistic differences, the belief system of Dersim is quite distinct from the rest of the region. The Kurds of Turkey predominantly adhere to the Shafî'i School of jurisprudence of the Sunni branch of Islam. By contrast, the Dersimi people are Alevis. Since the difference between these two beliefs are so drastic, and the stigma that associated with Alevism is so strong,⁵⁹⁴ these factors led to the self-identification of the Dersimi people with their religious affiliation, Alevism (*Alevilik*) rather than their linguistic and ethnic identities.⁵⁹⁵ Alevis are known as the followers of Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin and the son-in-law of the prophet Mohammed although this definition is overly simplistic to describe the syncretic nature of their belief. As their name clearly suggests, the veneration of Ali and other family members of the prophet's household, *Ahl al-Bayt*, is important for their belief system but Alevism cannot be reduced to merely holding Ali and his descendants in high regard. Furthermore, the importance of Ali and the acceptance of

⁵⁹¹ Ludwig Paul, "Zaza." *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition* (Eds.) P.J. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel & W.P. Heinrichs. Brill Online, 2015. First appeared online: 2012, First Print Edition: 1960-2007, and "The Position of Zazaki among West Iranian Languages." Nicholas Sims-Williams (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 3rd Conference of the Societas Iranologica Europæa held in Cambridge, 11-15 September 1995* (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 1998), pp. 163-177.

⁵⁹² Daimi Cengiz, "İsmail Beşikçi ve Dersim Paneli." *Bianet*, August 8, 2013.

⁵⁹³ For the essential work of this approach, see Tuncer Gülensoy, *Kürmanci ve Zaza Türkçeleri Üzerine Bir Araştırma: İnceleme ve Sözlük* (Ankara: Türk Kültürü Araştırma Enstitüsü, 1983).

⁵⁹⁴ As an example for this stigma, for a typical Kurdish or Turkish Sunni who follow the Islamic traditions, eating food prepared by Alevis, or marrying someone from an Alevi family are strictly forbidden, since they are perceived as non-Muslims.

⁵⁹⁵ The term, *Kizilbash*, which is most of the time used pejoratively by the Sunnis of Turkey, is also used by Alevis to define themselves, without any negative connotations. For more information on Alevism, see Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türk Sufiliğine Bakışlar* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1996), Ali Yaman & Aykan Erdemir, *Alevism-Bektashism: A Brief Introduction* (London: England Alevi Cultural Centre & Cem Evi, 2006), and Irene Melikoff, *Uyur İdik Uyardılar* (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1993).

his descendants as rightful *imams* do not equate Alevism with Shia Islam. Alevism differs from both Sunni and Shia Islam, and not just in appearance but in essence, as well. The creed, the rituals, and core beliefs of Alevism all differ from the mainstream Sunni and Shia versions of Islam. In Alevism, the compulsory practices of both Sunni and Shia Islam, such as daily prayers (*Salat*), pilgrimage to Mecca (*Hajj*) or the fasting during the month of Ramadan, are not observed. Unique religious ceremonies, such as *Cem*, are performed in local vernacular – mostly in Turkish – and open to both men and women. Music and dance are incorporated into religious rituals. Poets such as Pir Sultan Abdal, Fuzuli and Shah Ismail are recognized as saints and their poetry is venerated as sacred texts. The place of worship is not the mosque but rather the *Cemevi* (Cem house) where the *Cem* rite is conducted.

Alevism is not unique to Dersimis, but is the largest religious minority in Sunni-dominated Turkey. Alevis in Turkey are from the Arab, Zaza and Turkish ethnicities. Today their numbers are estimated around 12 million. The majority of them are from Turkish decent, including a very small group of Azeri speakers in north-eastern Turkey. Arabic speaking Alevis live along the Mersin-Adana-Antakya line in southern Turkey, close to the Syrian border. The religious rituals of the Arabic speaking Alevis are very similar to their *Nusayri* (or *Alawite*)⁵⁹⁶ counterparts who live across the border. Their number today is estimated around 200,000. The population of the Zaza Alevis (including Dersimis) is estimated to be around 3 million.⁵⁹⁷

Among many assumptions on the origins of Alevism, the most common one claims that it is a branch of Twelver Shia Islam due to the leitmotif of reverence shown to Ali and his descendants. Since the similarities between Twelver Shia and Alevism end there, the dissimilarities are explained by the modification of the Shia beliefs due to the effects of the pre-Islamic traditions of the Anatolian people (*Shamanism*), Sufism and the influences of the other religions of the area, such as Christianity, and Khurramiyah which led to the emergence of a highly eclectic and esoteric religious belief, that radically departs from Orthodox Shia Islam. Although this definition of Alevism is widely accepted, the nature of Alevism and its position within the Islamic community is widely questioned in Turkey. Apart from the aforementioned view of

⁵⁹⁶ In addition to the difference in rituals, there are some theological differences between the majority of the Alevis in Turkey and the Nusayris. For more information, see Meir M. Bar-Asher and Aryeh Kofsky, *The Nusayri-Alawi Religion: An Enquiry into its Theology and Liturgy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002).

⁵⁹⁷ For the most recent numbers see Oran, *Türkiye'de Azınlıklar*.

Alevism as a synthesis of Islam, Shamanism, and other beliefs of the region, it is suggested that Alevism is interpreted in three other major ways. A second school considers Alevism as the “true form” of Islam, unspoiled and unblemished unlike other Islamic sects and asserts that Alevi religious officials, which are called ‘*Dede*’, are descendants of the Prophet Mohammed’s bloodline. The third school of thought regards Alevism not as an organized religion but more as a philosophy and *Weltanschauung* specific to Anatolia. According to Oran, a fourth school of thought considers Alevism not as an offshoot of Shia Islam, but as a denomination of its own, separate from Sunni, Shia, or Khariji Islam.⁵⁹⁸

Dersimi Alevi beliefs are even more eclectic due the inclusion of several animistic elements such as attribution of sacredness to geomorphological units, bodies of water and plants.⁵⁹⁹ It is theorized by some social scientists that the Dersimi Alevi belief system is derived from pre-Islamic ‘Kurdish religions’, such as Yazidi religion, and not from Turkic, Anatolian shamanism. For instance Beşikçi suggests that after observing the rituals and dances of Dersimi Alevis, he could not see any connections between Alevism and Central Asian dance routines, but he immediately recognized that Dersimis use similar patterns of movement to Yazidi rituals. Beşikçi also states that Alevism should not even be considered as a part of Islam.⁶⁰⁰ Haşim Kutlu agrees with Beşikçi and states that the Ali figure was inserted very late in the Alevi belief system in the 15th century.⁶⁰¹ These explanations sound similar to Mehrdad Izady’s much discussed theory of native ‘Kurdish religions’.⁶⁰² Izady claims that although the majority of the followers of Alevism are Turks, the religion originated among the pre-Islamic Kurds by considering the similarities between Alevism, and the other Mesopotamian religions adhered to mostly by Kurds. These are the Yazidi religion and the *Ahl-e Haqq* (People of the Truth), a religion practised by the Goran Kurds in

⁵⁹⁸ Oran, *Türkiye’de Azınlıklar*, p 28.

⁵⁹⁹ For a review of the Dersimi belief system, see Peter J. Bumke, “Kızılbaş-Kurden in Dersim (Tunceli, Türkei): Marginalität und Häresie.” *Anthropos*, Vol. 74, No. 3/4 (1979), pp. 530-548.

⁶⁰⁰ İsmail Beşikçi, “Aleviliğin İslam’la Alakası Yoktur!” *Dersim Gazetesi*, August 3, 2012.

⁶⁰¹ Haşim Kutlu, *Kızılbaş Alevilikte Yol, Erkan, Meydan, Alevilik Öğretisi* (Ankara: Yurt Kitap-Yayın, 2007), pp.127-128.

⁶⁰² Mehrdad R. Izady, *The Kurds: A Concise Handbook* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1992), pp. 170. It should be noted that Izady’s habit of assigning Kurdish ethnicity to almost every single community lived in Mesopotamia, Eastern Anatolia and Western Iran, severely diminishes the plausibility of most of his claims.

Western Iran. Similarly, Martin van Bruinessen pointed out the similarities between *Ahl-e Haqq* and Alevism.⁶⁰³

On the other hand Oran states that for many observers Alevism heavily resembles Central Asian Turkic religious beliefs and in time the figures that belonged to Central Asia were replaced by their counterparts in the Middle East and Anatolia. According to Oran, for these observers the *shaman* was replaced with the *Dede*, the central cult of Sun was replaced with the Cult of Ali, and the shamanistic rituals were turned into non-Islamic Alevi rituals of *Cem*, *Nefes*, and *Semah*.⁶⁰⁴ Oran further states that the reason for the overlap between the Alevi beliefs and Shia Islam are limited to the concepts of Ali, Hasan, Husein and *Kerbela*,⁶⁰⁵ is that these were perceived as symbols of liberation against oppression and resembled the symbols of the Alevis.⁶⁰⁶ Different from these interpretations calling Dersimi Alevism as the “Dersimi Belief System” and situating it as a unique micro-religion different from mainstream Alevism, Islam and Izady’s Kurdish native religions theory is also steadily gaining ground in Dersim and the Dersimi diaspora.⁶⁰⁷ Regardless of the sources of Alevism, it is evident that the Dersimi religion is the central concept of the Dersimi identity which has differentiated them from their Turkish and Kurdish (or Zaza) neighbours who adhered to Sunni Islam. To define such an elaborate, isolated and unique identity such as the Dersimi belief system simply with national or ethnic forms or belongingness would be misleading.

⁶⁰³ Martin Van Bruinessen, "When Haji Bektash Still Bore the Name of Sultan Sahak: Notes on the Ahl-i Haqq of the Guran District." Alexandre Popović & Gilles Veinstein (Eds.) *Bektachiyya: études sur l'ordre mystique des Bektachis et les groupes relevant de Hadji Bektach* (Istanbul: ISIS, 1995).

⁶⁰⁴ *Cem* is the central rite of Alevis. It is a gathering of the believers representing the *miraj*, the ascension of Prophet Mohammed to heaven and his meeting with other Islamic prophets. *Cem* usually takes place in a *Cemevi* (Cem house), is participated both by men and women and conducted by a *Dede*. In *Cem*, prayers are recited and *Nefes*, religious hymns accompanied by music provided by *saz* players are performed. A special form of dance which is called *Semah* and choreographed in imitation of the flight of cranes, a sacred bird for Alevis, is performed jointly by men and women. *Cem* rite also acts as a social gathering aiming to get Alevis together and resolve any conflicts between the members of the congregation. For more information on *Cem*, see Mehmet Yaman, *Alevilikte Cem* (Istanbul: Can Yayinlari, 2003).

⁶⁰⁵ To remember and mourn the death of Prophet Mohammed’s grandson Hussein at Kerbela, Alevis fast for a period of twelve days in the month of *Moharram*. To experience and simulate the deprivation of water of Hussein and his followers suffered in Kerbela, and to condemn the violence led to their death, Alevis do not drink water, or consume meat during this period.

⁶⁰⁶ Oran, *Türkiye’de Azınlıklar*, pp. 28-29.

⁶⁰⁷ *Kirmanciye Beleke* periodical supports this theory and treats Dersimi belief-system as a micro-religion.

Furthermore from the available archival documents it is impossible to deduce that the Dersim ‘rebellion’ had a Kurdish nationalist agenda. In fact it is impossible even to verify the existence of a large scale rebellion against the government because the campaign against Dersim was not a reaction against an uprising but it was planned by the government years before the first skirmishes between the Dersimi militia and the state forces and proved to be a rather one-sided affair. During the campaigns of 1937 and 1938, the Republic lost only 152 security personnel, which is immensely disproportional in comparison to the 13,422 Dersimi casualties.⁶⁰⁸ The numbers alone suggest a massacre instead of a large scale Kurdish uprising. The Kurdish and Turkish nationalist theses also do not provide an answer to the question of why the ‘Kurds’ of this particular region were killed en masse while towns and cities with greater Kurdish populations remained unharmed. If ethnic cleansing of all Kurds was the official Republican policy, why did the Kurds of South-eastern Anatolia not suffer from massacres on this scale?

The answer to these questions is apparent upon examining the Republican ideology. First, as mentioned in the previous chapters, in the 1930s the Republican policy concerning minorities was not geared toward their extermination. The official policy of this era concerning the minorities was called Turkification (*‘Türkleştirme’*) which was a process of forced assimilation in which citizens of Turkey from all ethnicities were forced to accept the new, modern, national Turkish identity. Aktar defines Turkification as:

The uncompromising exertion of the Turkish ethnic identity’s authority over every aspect of social life including the language used in the streets, history taught in schools, education policies, economic life, trade, personnel recruitment regime, private law and settlement policies includes relocation of minorities to some regions.⁶⁰⁹

Turkification was an elaborate process executed by every institution of the state, from cultural institutions such as the education system to the military and administrative units. The regime presented opportunities for each minority to renounce their own identities and accept the identity developed by the regime in this process. According to Ahmet Yıldız, this new Republican identity can be summarized as

⁶⁰⁸ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.751...30.

⁶⁰⁹ Aktar, *Türkleştirme Politikaları*, p. 101.

follows: A Turkish citizen must speak Turkish, must be a member of the westernized Turkish culture, and must wholeheartedly accept the principles of the Republic.⁶¹⁰ If any citizen failed to observe one of these features, he or she had to find a way to be promoted to full-citizenship. Measures which could be used for this promotion were various. For Kurds, the path to Turkishness was only possible by embracing the Turkish language and culture.

Furthermore, the regime supported the Turkification process with its ideological tools in the social sciences the “Twin Theses” of history and linguistics. As mentioned in the previous chapters, every ethnicity and every linguistic group in Anatolia were deemed to be Turkish in essence by the government after 1935. The Turkish Historical Society decided in 1935, during the Second History Congress of the Turkish Historical Society that Anatolia had been populated by Turks for millennia and that from the Hittites to the Armenians all of the inhabitants of Anatolia were Turkish. According to this theory, citizens whose native languages were non-Turkish were the descendants of the aboriginal Turks who lived in Anatolia several millennia ago and therefore they were “ethnically” Turks who in time had “lost and forgot” their own Turkishness. The repercussions of Republican ideology regarding the situation of the minorities and the cultural tools possessed by the regime are visible also in the Dersim case. Government and military reports from this era continuously called the Dersimi people as “original” Turks⁶¹¹ who originated from the Khorasan region in North-Eastern Iran and Central Asia – the ancestral homeland of Turkish people according to Republican nationalism – and were linguistically and religiously Persianized due to close relations and proximity with Iran. For instance, parliament member Hasan Reşit Tankut wrote in his report to Ankara that he was sure that Dersimis were “one hundred per cent Turkish”, who forgot their Turkishness due to their contacts with “Persian” culture.⁶¹² For Republican nationalism, Kurds and Zazas

⁶¹⁰ Yıldız, p. 229

⁶¹¹ “Öz Türk” in Turkish.

⁶¹² Hasan Reşit Tankut (1891-1980) was a historian, writer and politician who served as parliament member from the Republican People’s Party continuously between 1931 and 1960. Tankut was an active member of the Turkish Linguistic Society and acted as the vice-president who oversaw the etymology and linguistic philology branches of the institution. His official duties also included teaching history at the Faculty of Language, History and Geography in Ankara. Tankut visited Dersim in 1928 with the Inspector-General İbrahim Talî Öngören and prepared a lengthy report about the region in 1931. In 1932 the report was sent to the Prime Minister by Öngören. An expanded version of the report was later released by Tankut under the title of “Sociological Researches on Zazas”. According to Van Bruinessen, Tankut’s work constituted the basis for the propaganda booklets published by Institute for

were not unwanted ethnicities. In fact they were promising candidates for the Turkification process. After all, as Tankut stated in his report, all they had to do was “to be reminded of their own Turkishness”.

Secondly, the modern Kurdish and Turkish nationalists make the mistake of looking at the history of Dersim only through the lenses of their own respective ideologies. For Kurdish nationalists, the Dersim massacres were a part of the larger framework of the subjugation of the Kurds by the Arab, Iranian and Turkish polities after the emergence of nation states in the Near and Middle East following the end of the First World War. According to this approach, the Dersim campaign targeted the ‘Kurds’ of Dersim due to their ethnic identity. Although it is apparent from the government records that the Dersimi people only staged a defensive resistance, in most Kurdish nationalist sources, the Dersim incidents are depicted as a heroic uprising or revolt for the nationalist cause. For instance, in an article written by Kurdish nationalists in Syria during the first phase of the military campaign, Sayyid Rıza, the most respected chieftain of Dersim was declared as the “Governor-General of Kurdistan” who had an army of 100,000 “Kurds, regardless of their religious affiliation.”⁶¹³ Beşikçi used this nationalist discourse as well, and described Rıza as “the leader of the Kurdish nationalist resistance” in his works.⁶¹⁴ According to these sources Rıza had the political consciousness of a secular, modern Kurdish revolutionary and announced that they had built an autonomous government in Dersim. Furthermore, Rıza was described as a leader of both Alevi and Sunni Kurds, an idea which is inconceivable considering the historical animosity between these groups. Furthermore, at that time Rıza was not even the leader of all Dersim; personal feuds and feuds between tribes prevented this from happening. In 1937, the number of arms appropriated from Dersim was 4,263 and the arms of the pro-government tribes which were voluntary handed over to the government is included to this amount. According to the government reports, during the duration of the 1937 campaign which ended with Rıza’s arrest and following execution, the entire Dersimi resistance forces that clashed with the Turkish army and captured dead or wounded were only 298

the Study of Turkish Culture in 1980s. For Tankut’s report, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...23. For a recently published booklet version of the report, see Tankut, *Zazalar Üzerine Sosyolojik Tetkikler*.

⁶¹³ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.745...11.

⁶¹⁴ Beşikçi, *Tunceli Kanunu*, p. 169.

people.⁶¹⁵ These numbers alone show how inflated and out of touch with reality are the numbers uttered by the Kurdish nationalists.

Similarly, in an article published at *La Bourse Egyptienne*, a Francophone newspaper published in Alexandria, Kurdish nationalists wrote that “this revolt is the last one in a chain of continuous Kurdish nationalist revolts against the Turks”. Although there is not a single piece of evidence to prove this, according to this piece, Sayyid Rıza was a national hero who was trying to gain independence for all Kurds and avenge the death of Sheikh Said, the Nakshbandi cleric who campaigned for the reinstatement of the Sharia law in 1925 while in reality the revolt he led had not attracted any Alevis or Dersimis, including Sayyid Rıza.⁶¹⁶ From the available sources it becomes rather apparent that these letters were propaganda pieces, which were most probably produced by Nuri Dersimi (1890-1973), who managed to be remembered as a key figure in Dersimi history and Kurdish nationalism, mostly by self-advertisement and a very liberal interpretation of the events that occurred in Dersim.

Nuri Dersimi, as his name suggests, was a Dersimi intellectual who was an ideologue and ardent follower of Kurdish nationalism. A veterinarian by profession, Nuri Dersimi became a member of the nascent Kurdish nationalist organizations in 1910s and later claimed that he was instrumental in inciting a Kurdish revolt in the eastern Anatolian town of Sivas in 1920. Nuri Dersimi returned to Dersim in 1921 and worked as a public servant. Later Dersimi left Dersim to live in the neighbouring town of Elazığ, and before the start of the military campaign of 1937, he moved to live in Syria. From here he began to act as a speaker for the people of Dersim. Although he had at best limited connection with the region after 1937, his personal narrative of the events became gospel for both Kurdish and Turkish nationalism due to the lack of sources on the Dersim massacres. Dersimi’s two books, *Dersim in Kurdish History* (*‘Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim’*, 1952) and *My Memoirs* (*‘Hatıratım’*, 1986) are still the most referenced works on Dersim despite the fact that they were written by the author while he was in Syria, far-removed from the epicentre of the massacres. Nuri Dersimi’s books lack a referencing system and they contain various disputable stories that serve only the self-aggrandisement of the author. Furthermore, they are filled with factual errors which are unfortunately still referenced by contemporary social

⁶¹⁵ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.751...30.

⁶¹⁶ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.751...20.

scientists.⁶¹⁷ Dersimi's works are written through the lens of his Kurdish nationalist ideology and misrepresent the events and the important actors of Dersim history for the benefit of his ideology. In Dersimi's writings, Sayyid Rıza, a tribal chief who did not show any previous inclinations towards Kurdish nationalism, and never participated in previous 'Kurdish uprisings', is a model, modern Kurdish nationalist.⁶¹⁸ Dersimi even did not shy away from fabricating nationalist propaganda on Sayyid Rıza's behalf. An illustrative example of these fabrications is related to the execution of Sayyid Rıza and his last words. The only first-hand account of this execution was written by İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil, a young civil servant who was presiding over the execution process. Çağlayangil, who later served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the multi-party period in Turkey, depicted the last moments of Sayyid Rıza in his memoir. According to Çağlayangil, the last words of Rıza were; "We are the children of *Karbala*. We are innocent. This is a disgrace. This is cruelty. This is murder."⁶¹⁹ On the other hand, Nuri Dersimi who did not witness the event, instead fabricated an agitative speech as Sayyid Rıza's last words. According to Dersimi, who did not even know the exact date of the execution and was not even in Turkey during the event, Rıza shouted these words at the gallows: "I am 75. Soon I will be a martyr. Soon I will join to the ranks of other martyrs of Kurdistan. Dersim is losing the war, but Kurdishness and Kurdistan will remain alive forever! The Kurdish youth will take their revenge! Damn the oppressors, damn the turncoats and the liars!"⁶²⁰

It is apparent from this example that Nuri Dersimi manipulated the truth to impose Kurdish identity and nationalism in the struggle between the Dersimis and the state forces. Another interesting point is how he erased Sayyid Rıza's remarks on "Children of *Karbala*". Nuri Dersimi blatantly removed the Alevi identity from Rıza's last words and changed it with a pan-Kurdist discourse. Therefore, Dersimi's books

⁶¹⁷ For instance, the execution date of Sayyid Rıza is 15th of November, 1937 but Nuri Dersimi erroneously cited the date as 18th of November. Beşikçi used this inaccurate date in his work, as well. Due to the popularity of these sources and lack of original research, even recent works tend to repeat this mistake. For an example, Ramazan Aras claimed that "[Seyid Rıza] was hung (*sic*) with his son and five other rebels on 18 November 1937." See Ramazan Aras, *The Formation of Kurdishness in Turkey: Political Violence, Fear and Pain* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 58.

⁶¹⁸ For more information on Nuri Dersimi and his nationalist account on Dersim, see M. Nuri Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim* (Aleppo: Anı Matbaası, 1952) and *Hatıratım* (Stockholm: Roja Nu, 1986).

⁶¹⁹ His exact words were: "Evladi Kerbelayih. Bi hatayik. Ayiptir. Zulumdur. Cinayettir." See, Tanju Cıloğlu (Ed.), *İhsan Sabri Çağlayangil'in Anıları: Kader Bizi Una Değil, Üne İtti* (Ankara: Bilgi, 2007), pp. 72-73.

⁶²⁰ Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, p. 290.

are only valuable as documents regarding the nature of Kurdish nationalism but as neutral historical narratives, they are not reliable. Martin Van Bruinessen arrives to a similar conclusion on Dersimi and criticizes him for being too eager to call the Dersim incidents a nationalist rebellion, since the events show “more the signs of a traditional tribal resistance to the government interference than anything so modern as the wish for a separate state.”⁶²¹ As stated by Van Bruinessen, in Dersim the focal point of politics, and social life has never been ordered by the ideology of the Kurdish struggle for independence. In fact, the issue of Kurdish nationalism was a foreign concept for the residents of Dersim. Sayyid Rıza, who was called as the “Governor-General of Kurdistan” by Nuri Dersimi, was a modest tribal leader. He did not rule over other tribes, he only had a higher level influence due to his personality and his religious-cultural position as a *Sayyid*.

The assessment that the tribes of Dersim had a national consciousness is quite easy to refute. Dersimi politics were politics of tribal conflicts in which the alliances between the tribes changed constantly according to the material needs of the tribes or personal feuds between the tribal chiefs. The political sphere was quite dynamic. An example from the archival documents sheds further light on this issue. Prior to the massacres of 1938, the most dramatic event of recent Dersim history had been the murder of Sayyid Rıza’s son Baba in 1933. According to the reports by the governor of the neighbouring town of Elazığ, the perpetrators of the crime were members of *Kirgan* tribe. An enraged Rıza asked the government to locate and arrest the murderers or provide him ammunition to help him to hunt them down. Using his prestige and the rightfulness of his cause he managed to arm 500 men and threatened the neutral tribes with execution in case if they protect the murderers of his son. According to government reports, the feud between the two sides developed into a civil war in Dersim. The Republican security personnel located in the region did not even try to intervene because they were inferior in number in comparison to Sayyid Rıza’s militia and they did not want to further inflame an already tense situation. Rıza’s forces targeted the villages populated by the members of his rival tribe. The villagers who managed to escape from him found refuge in the military outposts of the Turkish Army. Initially, Sayyid Rıza seized the district of Sin from the *Kirgan* tribe as blood

⁶²¹ Bruinessen, “Genocide in Kurdistan?”

money to compensate for the death of his son.⁶²² A month later Rıza came into contact with the government through the governor's office in Elazığ and stated that he and his tribe had been victims of *Kirgan* aggression for a long time and added that the feud started back in the late Ottoman era. According to Rıza, when the *Kirgan* tribe seized and plundered government property, his tribe fought with the government forces against *Kirgan* and in these skirmishes the chief of the *Kirgan* tribe was killed which started a long blood feud that ended with the murder of his son.⁶²³ Rıza further blamed the district governor (*kaymakam*) for being in league with *Kirgan* for personal gain and asked the government's help to stop their aggression.⁶²⁴ Later in July 1936, Rıza met with government officials and promised them not to seek any further revenge as long as the property he confiscated from the *Kirgan* tribe as blood money would remain in his possession.⁶²⁵ These events show the relations between the tribes and the relations between the tribes and the government shifted constantly without being obstructed by ideological or ethnic concerns. Secondly, these documents show that the tribes did not have any type of nationalist consciousness. Apart from their tribal identity, the overriding source of belongingness was their religious affiliation; Dersimi Alevism. Therefore it is very plausible to assume that the alleged modern nationalist Kurdish identity of the region is a product of the imaginations and aspirations of Nuri Dersimi and other Kurdish nationalists. They were not alone in this endeavour though; strangely Turkish nationalism also approached the Dersim incidents through a similar lens.

These dramatizations and falsifications of the events fed the Turkish nationalist account of the incidents. Especially after 1980s, these two very contrasting groups, Kurdish and Turkish nationalists, started to share the belief that Dersim was heading for a full-fledged nationalist revolt for the independence of all of Kurdistan. From these falsifications, Kurdish nationalists manufactured a heroic narrative while Turkish nationalists found support for their claims that the state was entitled to use “necessary force” to suppress separatist revolts, like the Republican regime supposedly did in Dersim in 1937-1938. While the first accounts on Dersim written in

⁶²² BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 113.779...1.

⁶²³ The feud between these two tribes is well documented. The Inspector-General of the region, İbrahim Talî Öngören stated in a report that he wrote in 1929, that there was a long-standing “mutual hatred” between them. See BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...23.

⁶²⁴ Presidential Archives (Çankaya Cumhurbaşkanlığı Arşivi – CCA) CCA: 01010580-32.

⁶²⁵ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 113.779...11.

1930s emphasized the resistance shown against the modernization attempts of the government and the “feudal” system of Dersim as the main reasons for the campaign, starting from 1980s, the nationalist approach which blamed Dersimis for treason, started to become more and more noticeable in Turkish history writing. The main reason for this change was the necessity felt by Turkish nationalists to redefine and reposition themselves against the rising Kurdish national consciousness after the beginning of protracted guerrilla warfare by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê* – PKK) in early 1984. The rather reductionist assumption of perceiving the Dersim incidents as a Kurdish nationalist, separatist uprising was useful on many different levels for contemporary Turkish nationalists because it created a link between Kurdish identity and the concept of rebellion against authority. According to this discourse Kurds participated in a series harmful activities against the state right from the beginning of the Republic, in fact even from Ottoman times. This claim was exploited by the Turkish nationalists to show that Kurds were intrinsically bent on betraying state authority. Additionally, the massacres were used to justify the disproportionate force used by the state to suppress the activities of the PKK which caused several severe human rights violations, and, to legitimize the use of similar methods of suppression in the struggle against the PKK in the future. A recent use of this discourse was seen in a parliamentary speech of Onur Öymen, a parliament member from the Republican People’s Party who asked the government to have resort to stricter measures when dealing with the Kurdish nationalist demands by giving the example of how Atatürk used force to stop the revolt in Dersim.⁶²⁶

There are other contributions made by Turkish nationalism to the debate on the nature of the Dersim incidents. One of them takes the international constellation of the era into account and evaluates the operation in relation to Turkish foreign policy. For Republican Turkey, the most crucial foreign policy issue of 1930s was the situation in Sanjak. Sanjak was the name of the region located along the southern borders of Turkey which included the cities of Alexandretta, Antioch and their surrounding

⁶²⁶ Öymen’s exact words were: “Did not the mothers cry during [the suppression of] the Dersim revolt?” Öymen made this remark during the parliamentary debates on November 10, 2009, regarding the proposed “peace process” of the ruling Justice and Development Party to end the armed conflict with the PKK. The slogan of the peace process was “stop the tears of the mothers” of the belligerents from both sides of the conflict. Öymen’s comments which were perceived as favouring the state security over human rights and glorifying the devastation in Dersim as a proportionate use of force drew severe criticism from the Dersimi people and social organizations. Even MPs from Öymen’s own party asked him to resign. For the speech, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre XXIII, Cilt 52, pp. 501-502.

towns. These lands were carved out of Ottoman Empire after the First World War by the French, as a part of French sphere of influence which included modern Syria and Lebanon, as well. According to the Franco-Turkish Agreement of 1921 which concluded the hostilities of the First World War and Turkish War of Independence between these two states, France did not return these lands to the Ankara Government and kept them in the French mandate while the Turkish Republic was given observer's status. This special status of Sanjak was approved again at the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923. In the 1930s, Sanjak became the source of a dispute among Turkey, France and Syria.⁶²⁷ From the documents in the Prime Ministerial Archives, one can sense that during the early days of the preparation process for the military campaign, the Republican regime was expecting French or Syrian infiltration to Southern Turkey. In addition to the strained relations over the Sanjak issue, the presence of the Kurdish nationalists in Syria made the Republican regime suspicious of the activities along the Syrian-Turkish border. The Kurdish nationalists in Syria were members of the *Xoybun* organization, which can be described as the first modern, nationalist and influential group of mostly educated Kurdish nationalists. The Arab nationalists in Syria as well were at odds with the Republicans because they regarded Sanjak as an integral part of the Greater Syria they envisaged. In these circumstances, the government was suspecting that arms and ammunition could be smuggled into Turkey from these sources in Syria. France was also perceived in this era as a country which could incite revolts or similar problems in Turkey to keep Sanjak in the French mandate as much as possible. These possible connections would later turn into a Turkish nationalist discourse on the Dersim "rebellion" being supported by the foreign powers.

For instance, among contemporary nationalists, Sinan Meydan wrote that the "imperialist powers" supported the uprising in Dersim. Meydan bases this presumption mainly on the letters which were attributed to Dersimi leader Sayyid Rıza.⁶²⁸ Similarly Suat Akgül stated that France and Syria helped the Dersimis weaken the Turkish Republic in order to gain control of Sanjak.⁶²⁹ Among the documentation available in the Prime Ministerial Archives, there is not a single document supporting

⁶²⁷ For more information on the Sanjak issue, see See Stefanos Yerasimos, *Milliyetler ve Sınırlar: Balkanlar, Kafkasya ve Ortadoğu* (İstanbul: İletişim, 1994).

⁶²⁸ Sinan Meydan, *Cumhuriyet Tarihi Yalanları 2: Atatürk ve Cumhuriyet Düşmanlarına Belgeli Cevaplar* (İstanbul: İnkılap, 2009), p. 112.

⁶²⁹ Suat Akgül, *Yakın Tarihimizde Dersim İsyanları ve Gerçekler* (İstanbul: Boğaziçi, 1992), pp. 104-110.

these theses. In fact, there are a dozen documents which prove that there are no links between the Dersim incidents and the foreign powers or the Kurdish diaspora. Government reports clearly show that no weapons have arrived to Dersim from Syrian or French sources. Furthermore, Dersim was not even close to the Syrian border, and the inaccessibility of the region makes it even harder for infiltration. Numerous security intelligences about Kurdish agents from Syria planning meetings with Dersimi tribal leaders were later invalidated by other government reports. For instance, an intelligence report from Syria stated that a meeting between Kurdish leaders in Syria and Dersimi leaders would happen in Diyarbakir. No such meeting occurred according to the latter government documents.⁶³⁰

Meydan's claims of an international conspiracy which targeted the Turkish government by supporting the Dersim rebellion are quite common in Turkish nationalist discourse. For instance, investigative journalist Uğur Mumcu wrote that Sayyid Rıza appealed to the British government for help with a letter to prove that there was a foreign connection behind the "rebellion".⁶³¹ This letter which was also sent to the French government and a similar, yet longer and more detailed letter that was sent to the League of Nations in September 1937, have an interesting story that speaks volumes on how Kurdish and Turkish nationalist narratives converge. Written from the point of Kurdish nationalism, the letters stated that the Turkish government was not qualified to represent the Kurds, and blamed the Turkish army for various crimes committed in Dersim, ranging from bombardment of the civilians, including children and women, to the execution of Kurdish intellectuals. The letters ended with a plea to get help to the Kurdish cause signed by Sayyid Rıza. These documents are used by the nationalists on both sides. For Kurdish nationalists, they support their imagination of Sayyid Rıza as Kurdish nationalist hero. For Turkish nationalists, they prove the anti-Turkish sentiments of the Dersimi rebellion and fortifies their perception of the "Kurdish Question" being manufactured and stirred up by the foreign powers who wanted to weaken Turkey. It is unfortunate for both parties that these letters were not written by Sayyid Rıza.

In October 1937, the letters sent to the League of Nations were brought to the attention of the Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya. The investigation conducted by the

⁶³⁰ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.743...16.

⁶³¹ Mumcu, "19. Ayaklanma."

ministry clearly ruled out any possibility that the letter was penned by Sayyid Rıza himself. According to Minister Kaya, this letter was an obvious fake, which was written by Kurdish nationalists living in Syria. The League of Nations also did not consider the letter important and did not take any action.⁶³² Years later, it turned out that Şükrü Kaya's presumption regarding the true writer of the letter was correct. Nuri Dersimi accepted in 1952 that he wrote the appeal himself while he was in Syria and used Sayyid Rıza's name to give the pleas the mantle of formality and legitimacy and sent copies of the letter to foreign countries and international organizations. Dersimi also admitted that this was not the first time that he produced letters by using Rıza's name.⁶³³ Strangely, the letter is still used by the nationalists of both sides according to their ideological concerns.⁶³⁴

In summary, the Kurdish and Turkish nationalist ideologies ironically converge on projecting their own perspective on the events of 1937-38 without considering the realities of the region. In the Dersim of the 1930s, primary identification of the people was not an ethnic one. The identities of the Dersimis were shaped by their tribal, cultural and religious affiliations and local traditions and not by nationalist considerations. In addition to the local Alevi religious culture, Dersimis once protected and intermarried with the Armenians who found refuge in this mountainous region during the Armenian massacres of 1915.⁶³⁵ Therefore although the region was isolated, Christian religious rites and Armenian culture also contributed to the unique common culture of Dersim which further prevents Dersim from being described as a monolithic Kurdish national body. Trying to explain the rather complicated events in Dersim in which diverse elements such tribalism, religious differences, mutual distrust between the Dersimis and the state forces, and the resistance against the modernization attempts of the government played significant parts, just with the nationalist absolutes would be inadequate and misleading. There was no Kurdish nationalist rebellion in Dersim because Dersim was neither Kurdish

⁶³² For the letter and Şükrü Kaya's investigation, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...20.

⁶³³ For the text of the letters sent to the members of the international community, see Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, pp. 295-303. For Dersimi's claim of previously sending letters in Sayyid Rıza's name, see Dersimi, *Hatıratım*, p. 106.

⁶³⁴ For some examples of recent accounts which still claim that it was Sayyid Rıza who sent the letter to appeal the international community, see Nicole Watts, "Relocating Dersim: Turkish State-Building and Kurdish Resistance, 1931-1938." *New Perspectives on Turkey*, No. 23 (2000), pp 22-23., and David McDowall, *A Modern History of the Kurds* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1996), p. 208.

⁶³⁵ Oran, "1937-38'de Ne Oldu?"

in its modern sense nor the site of a mass rebellion against the government. The Dersimis felt at unease with the new set of rules that were proposed by the Republic which wanted to disarm them and change the ancient internal social order of Dersim. Their panic triggered the implementation of a meticulously planned invasion in 1937, which led to a wide-scale massacre in 1938.

My proposal here is that to explain this complex chain of events, we should focus on the thought process of the government that was fixated on modernization. The most plausible reason for the nearly complete destruction of Dersim was the tribal, supposedly non-modern and therefore, non-Turkish life-style of its people. This interpretation is clearly verifiable by the government reports and newspaper articles published following the events by the regime-friendly Republican media. For the Republican regime, the massacres of 1938 were simply a by-product of the Republican policies based on modernization and creating an ideal community. It is baffling how the modernization project could be so productive and constructive in some fields such as the women's rights and education, yet being so destructive at the same time. The rigidity of the modernization process and the ruling elite's fanatical devotion to it, certainly helped whilst fighting against illiteracy, a patriarchal social order where women's visibility in the social sphere was minimal, or industrial backwardness, but the illegalization of every source of difference, every other form of thought and practice except the modernist, national model provided by the state led the regime to take draconian measures.

The importance of Dersim multiplies when dealing with Turkish authoritarianism from this perspective. Contrary to the modern interpretations, Dersim massacres were not a quick tempered reaction to a Kurdish rebellion or an act to prevent an imminent security question. This was an immaculately planned military campaign to completely change the internal social order of Dersim which turned into slaughter for an eclectic set of reasons. In the end, the massacres were justified by the regime by pointing out that the Dersimi people were savages who lived in caves in extreme poverty. From the official perspective of the regime, they were living unmodern, non-ideal lives that were not worth living, thus their destruction was a necessity to build a foundation for a new, improved, modern Dersimi society fully integrated within the modern, ideal, Turkish community.

Dersim in the Government Reports

Most of the government reports prepared on Dersim before the 1937-1938 campaigns deal with security concerns and criminal activities perpetrated by the Dersimi tribes. The combined effect of the previously mentioned geographical and cultural peculiarities of Dersim resulted in a social order in which political power was gathered in the hands of the tribal chiefs, while the spiritual and religious authority were *sayyids* and *dedes* who claimed family trees tracing back to the *Ahl al-Bayt*. In some cases, tribal chieftains also claimed spiritual leadership and assumed the title of Sayyid. However, despite their elevated status in the social sphere, the living conditions in Dersim were harsh even for the tribal leaders. The mountainous topography of the region limited the size of the arable land, therefore the tribe chieftains did not possess large lands in comparison to the tribal leaders of the rest of the Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia. The sharing of the precious land and the pastures for the livestock constitute a major problem for the tribes. The fact that they were armed made this problem even more serious. Arms were a part of Dersimi culture. According to the government reports the weapons were mostly acquired by Dersimis for self-defence. The cultural isolation of Dersim from the rest of the region and the constant harassment they suffered at the hands of the Sunni Ottoman state and their Sunni neighbours, forced the tribal chieftains to organize armed militia groups. Although the relatively low number of arms confiscated at the end of the military campaigns (6,117 in total) show these militia were relatively small in size, the reports prepared before the campaigns estimated a rather alarming rate of individual armament in the region. Inspector-General İbrahim Talî Öngören reported that in 1929 there were around 25,000 arms in the region⁶³⁶ while Minister of Interior Şükrü Kaya's report of 1931 stated that this amount was between 18,000 and 20,000.⁶³⁷

As the small-scale civil war fought in 1933-1934 between the forces of Sayyid Rıza and the *Kirgan* tribe showed, these firearms were used in struggles between the tribes but this was not the only concern of the government. The armed Dersimi tribes also formed a serious security concern for the nearby towns due to their almost constant plundering activities. Between 1929 and 1931 alone, 229 cases of pillage and robbery were committed by the people of Dersim in neighbouring Erzincan province

⁶³⁶ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...23.

⁶³⁷ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...22.

alone.⁶³⁸ Some government reports state that some tribes were even taxing the nearby towns. According to the reports of İbrahim Talî Öngören, the main reason for these incidents was the poverty prevalent in Dersimi society. Öngören states that the reason for “banditry, robberies and plundering occur in Dersim can be explained by the survival instincts of the Dersimis”.⁶³⁹

This situation which the Republic inherited from the late Ottoman era contributed to the association of Dersim with disorder in the eyes of the government. In 1931, Şükrü Kaya decided to see the situation himself and visited Dersim. The report he prepared reflects the level of discomfort felt by the rest of the region due to the unruly Dersimi tribes.⁶⁴⁰ Kaya stated that Dersimi harassment of the surrounding region was a “constant threat” and “the lives and the livelihoods of these people are trampled everyday under the feet of Dersimi tribes”. Kaya managed to visit inner Dersim and witnessed that the situation in Dersim was no different than the rest of the region; it was chaotic due to the ongoing fighting between the tribes. When the Interior Minister came together with Sayyid Rıza and other tribal chieftains they admitted the crimes and were apologetic and claimed that their dire economic situation, the scarcity of arable land and their ignorance had forced them to pillage the nearby towns. Furthermore they complained that the tribal system was withering away and due to the lack of social order the people, especially the Dersimi youth, were acting rampant. Another example given by the Minister of the Interior further illustrates the chaotic situation between the tribes. After a general meeting with all the tribal chieftains, Kaya also listened to every single tribal chieftain privately. In these private discussions, every chief blamed another one for the disorder in Dersim and the surrounding regions and they even went further by proposing the elimination of some chiefs to solve the problems of Dersim for good.

It is noticeable in the reports regarding Dersim that the government sincerely tried to understand the problems of the Dersimi people and to offer remedies to solve these issues. The language employed by the state officials show that they empathized

⁶³⁸ *Dersim Raporu*, (İstanbul: İletişim, 2010), p. 221. “Dersim Raporu” is a collection of detailed reports written on the region which was compiled in 1933-34. It summarizes most of the preceding civil and military reports concerning Dersim and gives the reader precious insight on government’s position regarding Dersim year by year. These collected volume of reports is valuable especially for the researchers who are not able to access the archives. The compiler of these reports is unknown.

⁶³⁹ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...23.

⁶⁴⁰ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...22.

with the situation of the Dersimis. A clear example of this approach is visible in a report prepared by Cemal Bardakçı, the governor of Diyarbakir.⁶⁴¹ Bardakçı wrote in 1925 that the tribal social order in Dersim was somehow justifiable because it was established due to the oppression of the Dersimi people which was perpetuated by the Sunni Ottoman regime and its inadequate public officers. Bardakçı claimed that due to this constant oppression the Dersimi people were forced to closely associate among themselves and had created a local social association of their own which should not be confused with the “traditional tribal system” which was prevalent in the rest of the Eastern and South-eastern Anatolia. The report further stated that the people of Dersim lived for generations in a constant state of fear of deportation and death. The people were also extremely poor that they were forced into acts of pillage and robbery out of their destitution. Similarly, the issue of the high rate of individual armament was born out of the necessity to protect their lives and goods since there had never been a firm government authority in the region for the previous 400 years. Bardakçı’s report shows a great deal of similarity with the report prepared by Inspector-General Öngören.⁶⁴² In this report which was written in 1929, the Inspector-General did not put the blame on the Dersimis and instead blamed the previous governments for their indifference to the sufferings and needs of the Dersimi people. Öngören stated that Dersim which “always acted as a mischievous child” needed the help of the Republican regime. Unlike Bardakçı, the Inspector-General was more critical towards the social order of Dersim and particularly targeted the tribal leaders and *sayyids*, who he described as “feudal despots”. Öngören further stated that the tribal chieftains and their religious counterparts, *sayyids* were financially exploiting the Dersimi people and remarked that their removal from Dersim was a necessity to bring prosperity to the region. In time, this analysis will constitute one of the major motives of the military campaigns of 1937-1938.

These reports show that right until 1929, the government representatives did not perceive any separatist Kurdish nationalist activity or a threat to national security in Dersim. The Dersimi people were perceived not as the source of the problems but as the victims of the problems. Even the criminal activities perpetrated by the Dersimi people were seen as problems that emanated from the inefficacy and the indifference

⁶⁴¹ For Cemal Bardakçı’s report, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 126.901...7.

⁶⁴² For İbrahim Talî Öngören’s report, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...23.

of the previous governments. The suggested solutions were also similar. Bureaucrats emphasized the complete lack of infrastructure in the region and advised the building of roads, schools and hospitals in the region and supporting local agriculture to win the hearts of the people of Dersim. As a significant difference Öngören suggested a more serious change of order by removing the tribal chieftains and the *sayyids*. This issue regarding the situation of the chiefs and religious leaders would become a recurring theme in the later reports as well. In 1931, Şükrü Kaya wrote that the most crucial problem of Dersim was the exploitation of the masses by the tribal chiefs and *sayyids*, and advised the government that a military operation targeting these elements was needed. Kaya's solution was similar to Öngören's suggestions to the government. He proposed that the chiefs and *sayyids* should be located far away from Dersim to break apart the long-standing traditional social order.⁶⁴³ Another remedy for the troubles of the region was the disarmament of the tribes. Additionally, almost in every single report it was advised that the aforementioned solutions should be accompanied by a modernization programme which included the construction of roads, schools and hospitals in the region.

It is interesting to see that among the government reports regarding Dersim there are so many comments and criticisms of the tribal order in Dersim. Although, as the report of Bardakçı stated, the tribal chieftains were not as wealthy as the tribal leaders of the rest of Anatolia due to the scarcity of the arable land, the social system of Dersim was still perceived to be backward and exploitative by the Republican bureaucrats. The media reaction concerning Dersim followed a similar pattern. During the first months of the military campaign *Son Posta* newspaper described Dersim as “the last bastion of feudalism” in Turkey.⁶⁴⁴ The statements of the bureaucrats and the newspaper reports show that the military campaign of 1937 was perceived by many as a battle between the modern state and the archaic feudal order. Regardless of the validity of the claims that define the social order in Dersim as a form of feudalism, the idea of the Republic fighting against “feudal landlords” does not fit with the larger framework of early Republican politics because since there was no social class that the Republican elite could rely on during the foundation of the Republic, the Republican elite supported the local notables and large land-owners.⁶⁴⁵ A significant

⁶⁴³ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.740...22.

⁶⁴⁴ *Son Posta*, June 17, 1937.

⁶⁴⁵ Ahmad, *The Making Of Modern Turkey*, pp 93-97.

number of large land-owners were members of the parliament during the single-party era and the government utilized their traditional connections with the peasantry which proved to be crucial for the regime, in exchange for representing the interests of the land-owners. A telling example of this symbiotic relationship is evident in the constitution of 1924 which prohibited the possibility of a land reform. Furthermore, as the previous reports show, the regime had not a perfect but a working relationship with the Dersimi tribal leaders, as well. Their meetings with Inspector-General Öngören and the Minister of the Interior Kaya show that the Republican regime perceived them as local notables and representatives of the Dersimi people. Additionally, some of the intelligence reports classified some of the tribes and their leaders as “state-friendly” which indicates that not all tribe chiefs were deemed unfavourable in the eyes of the government. Yet, the way the events unfolded, especially in 1938, show that even the bridges built between these tribal leaders and the state were burned down and the tribes and chieftains with which the government previously worked with were also targeted. This fact further proves the intricate nature of these massacres.

From the intelligence reports sent from the region to Ankara, it is apparent that the issues of disarmament and the relocation of the chiefs and *sayyids* made the Dersimi tribes feel uneasy about the modernization programme. In 1936, the new Inspector-General of the region, Tahsin Uzer wrote that the tribal leaders got together to discuss the disarmament issue and voiced their concerns. Uzer stated that the tribes were afraid of the possibility “of sharing the same fate as the Armenians” after voluntarily delivering their weapons to the government, referring to the mass murders of the unarmed, civilian, Ottoman Armenians in 1915.⁶⁴⁶ During the deportation and the massacres of the Armenians many of them took refuge in the Dersimi mountains, therefore Dersimi residents were well aware of their fate. According to Uzer, among the tribal chieftains, the opinion that the disarmament of the region would eventually led to their demise was “strong and long-standing as if it is a creed”. Therefore Uzer stated that a voluntary demilitarization would be almost impossible and the tribes would instinctively protect themselves. Another intelligence report from February 1936, supports Uzer’s assumptions. According to this report, several Dersim chiefs came together to discuss the increasing governmental interference in Dersim and the

⁶⁴⁶ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.743...12.

Republican modernization project. In these meetings the chiefs once again voiced their concerns about voluntary disarmament by citing the Armenian example. Similar concerns were pronounced about the government's plans to remove the tribal chiefs and *sayyids* from Dersim. The chiefs participating in the meetings stated that relocation of the chiefs could be a trick which would certainly end with their execution. Interestingly, some tribal leaders seemed to trust the government and believed that the government was planning to compassionately rehabilitate the region. It is noticeable that in time the optimism of both sides was replaced with a mutual distrust. Just as the tribal leaders suspected the motives of the government, the government also suspected a joint action of the Dersimi tribes who were previously at each other's throats. This mutual distrust would later prove to be the first step of the tragedy of Dersim.⁶⁴⁷

The government reports show how the plan for Dersim campaign was shaped in time. A mixture of Bardakçı's humanitarian outlook which suggested although it was possible to demilitarise Dersim with force it would be a bloody and painful option and the right path to follow for achieving perpetual peaceful social order in the region should be built on a strategy based on mutual trust and sympathy, and Öngören's views on the necessity of eradicating the social significance of the tribal chiefs and *sayyids* provided the basis of the social aspect of the Dersim campaigns of 1937-1938. Intelligence reports on the possible coalition of the tribes, and the following military reports which stated that a perpetual military presence in Dersim was needed for the demilitarization of the tribes and the implementation of the social aspects of the campaign created the security aspect of the plan. These two facets of the planning found their final form in Prime Minister İsmet İnönü's report from 1935. İnönü envisaged a three-staged rehabilitation for Dersim. These stages were; planning, demilitarization and rebuilding.⁶⁴⁸ İnönü estimated the first two stages of the plan would be completed within three years. The planning stage included the construction of the roads and military barracks, and the establishment of a military force stationed in the region to perform the forced demilitarization of the tribes which would not voluntarily hand over their firearms to the government. İnönü estimated that the second stage, the demilitarization of Dersim would start in 1937 and would be completed "as quickly as possible". Following the completion of this process, the

⁶⁴⁷ For these series of intelligence reports, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.743...13.

⁶⁴⁸ For Prime Minister İnönü's report, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 110.743...11.

rebuilding phase would begin. Considering that the military campaign for demilitarization started in 1937, İnönü's estimations were correct.

The Military Campaign of 1937 and the Massacres of 1938

The planning of the Dersim campaign was organized immaculately. Military reports that include detailed information on the roads, water supplies and the terrain of the region were prepared. The region was bound to Ankara with a railroad system. In 1934 the Settlement Law (*'Iskan Kanunu'*) was introduced. For some scholars, this law was specifically designed for the Dersim Campaign although this assumption is debatable mainly because military activities against Dersim were regularly planned years before the Settlement Law, but they were not put in motion for various reasons, the most important being the effects of the Great Depression of 1929.⁶⁴⁹ Nevertheless most of the articles can be related to certain aspects of the Dersim campaign. The most significant ones correspond to the termination of the tribal social order of Dersim and the expulsion of the tribal chiefs and *sayyids* from the region. Several articles of this law aimed for the dismantling the tribal social structure existing in Turkey. For instance Article 10a of the law stated that the legal personality of the tribes would not be recognized any more by the state and all of the privileges of tribal chieftains, *sheikhs* and *sayyids* would be revoked. Furthermore, according to Article 10b, the lands and real estates previously belonged to the legal personality of the tribes or the tribal leaders and *sheikhs* will be transferred to the state and will be distributed to the immigrants, refugees, nomads, relocated persons and landless farmers. This article was significantly aimed at changing the tribal social order of the region.⁶⁵⁰ Similarly, Article 10c targeted the authority of the *sheiks*, *aghas* and tribal chieftains and announced that these leaders will be relocated to other parts of the country with their families. This article provided a framework for the expulsion of certain tribal leaders from Dersim.

⁶⁴⁹ For a narrative which claims that the Settlement Law was specifically prepared for the Dersim campaign, see İsmail Beşikçi, *Tunceli Kanunu ve Dersim Jenosidi* (Istanbul: Belge, 1990). For the military campaign planned in 1931 but not put in motion due to budget restraints, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/110.741...2.

⁶⁵⁰ For the text of the Settlement Law, see *Resmi Gazete*, No. 2733 (June 21, 1934), Law No. 2510, p. 113-125.

The Settlement Law did not solely target the removal of the tribal leaders from Dersim. Article 10ç stated that tribes whose members were “not culturally Turkish” such as the Dersimi tribes whose Alevi Dersimi identity, traditions, and language all conflicted with the new, modern, national, Turkish identity promoted by the Republican regime, would be relocated to regions where assimilation into this new identity would be quicker. Furthermore, to prevent the possible emergence of diaspora communities of the relocated tribes in their new regions, tribal members would be dispersed among their new settlements and were not allowed to re-establish their cultural connection with their kin. This article would provide the basis of the removal of thousands of Dersimis after 1938 and their forced relocation to the Western regions of Turkey. Therefore even if the Settlement Law of 1934 was not specifically designed for the Dersim Campaign, these articles contributed to the establishment of a legal framework to change the social order of Dersim.

To control and hasten the project laid out by Prime Minister İnönü, on December 25, 1935, the Tunceli Law (*‘Tunceli Kanunu’*) was issued. With this law the name of the region was changed from its original Dersimi name which roughly translates as “The Silver Door” to Tunceli, Turkish for “The Bronze Hand” and a political system similar to a colonial rule was established in the region mirroring the infamous comment of the Chief of General Staff Fevzi Çakmak who stated in 1930 that it was impossible to gain the “Dersimi people through flattery. They would only understand the language of violence. Dersim should be dealt with as a colony.”⁶⁵¹ This internal colony would be led by a lieutenant-general who was appointed as the governor-general of Dersim and its surrounding region of Erzincan, Elazığ and Bingöl whose position and powers were similar to the authority that viceroys enjoyed in colonial empires. The Tunceli Law was bestowing the governor-general extraordinary powers including; the right to force people into exile, to replace public servants with acting military personnel, to appoint district governors and mayors, and to carry out death sentences without the National Assembly’s approval. This last article of the law was so severe and in conflict with basic principles of the rule of law that it even created a debate in the Grand Assembly which at that date was nothing more than a rubber stamp for governmental decisions. Hüsni Kitapçı, the deputy of Muğla province

⁶⁵¹ Dahiliye Vekâleti Jandarma Umum Kumandanlığı (Ed.), *Dersim Jandarma Umum Kumandanlığı Raporu – 1932* (Istanbul: Kaynak, 2010 [1932]), pp. 218-219.

remarked that bestowing a military general the power of issuing execution warrants was in clear contradiction with the Republican constitution and asked for the removal of this clause from the legislation but his proposal was not accepted by the majority of the parliament members.⁶⁵²

The Tunceli Law created a separate legal order for the region. An Independence Court was established in Elazığ so as to be able to act swiftly when the time arrived. According to the new legislation suspects were not allowed to know what they were charged with until they were put on trial or to use translators in court.⁶⁵³ In Dersim, where the overwhelming majority of the residents were unilinguals who could only speak Dimili, this clause made just trials virtually impossible. This extraordinary nature of the new quasi-colonial system of the region was called as the “Special Reform Programme”⁶⁵⁴ by the government. Step by step, the Republic prepared for a total assault. To support the military campaign, starting from 1936, military barracks, outposts, roads and telephone lines were built in the region. Some local elements who realized that this time the government was well-prepared to build a lasting authority over the region targeted these new constructions starting from March 20, 1937. According to Aygün, one of these attacks targeted a bridge in Pah district and one soldier lost his life.⁶⁵⁵ These attacks which were described by Prime Minister İnönü as a revolt against the “development and reform programme of the government” triggered the last phase of the military plan.⁶⁵⁶

In May 4, 1937, a cabinet meeting adopted a strategy which was described as a “fierce and penetrating attack” followed by “the disarmament and transfer of the insurgents”. The army would raid the villages, disarm the people who tend to participate in the anti-government activities and transfer them to the western regions. In this early cabinet decision the number of Dersimis who would be expelled was

⁶⁵² For the parliamentary discussion regarding the Tunceli Law, see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 7, pp. 178-180. It should be noted that during the discussion of this legislation at the Judicial Commission of the Grand Assembly, many parliament members opposed to several aspects of the law but they were not able to change the will of the government. For these debates see *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 7, Appendix: Munzur Vilayeti Teşkilat ve İdaresi Hakkında Kanun Layihası ve Dahiliye, Milli Müdafaa, Adliye ve Bütçe Encümenleri Mazbataları (1/304), pp. 4-8.

⁶⁵³ For the full text of the Tunceli Law, see *Resmî Gazete*, No. 3195 (June 25, 1931), Law No. 2884, pp. 5892-5893.

⁶⁵⁴ Prime Minister İsmet İnönü’s speech at the Grand Assembly, June 14, 1937. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 19, p. 315.

⁶⁵⁵ Hüseyin Aygün, “Dersim 1938’e Dair “Yeni” Belgeler, Bilgiler – 2.” *Bianet*, February 5, 2011.

⁶⁵⁶ İsmet İnönü’s speech at the Grand Assembly, June 14, 1937.

limited to 2,000 people. Among the government reports there is not a list of the Dersimis who would be deported but from the Republican discourse targeting tribal chieftains and *sayyids* and Prime Minister İnönü's speeches following the start of the campaign, it is apparent that tribal chieftains and *sayyids* were targeted first by the government to be rounded up and deported.

On June 14, 1937, İnönü explained the situation in Dersim to the Parliament and to the public. In his speech, İnönü once again targeted the tribal chieftains and blamed them for trying to prevent the modernization programme. He announced that the campaign was not just a military operation with limited ambitions but rather a reconstruction project that would eradicate the existing social order. İnönü stated that the construction of roads, bridges, schools and barracks would continue in the region. He also denounced news reports referring to heavy casualties and stated that in the last three months, 13 security personnel had been killed.⁶⁵⁷ İnönü was adamant in his speech, he promised to the parliament that the insurgency would not prevent the implementation of the reform programme and even if it were to take years, this programme would be implemented. After delivering the speech İnönü travelled to the region and arrived in Dersim on June 20 to personally inspect the progress of the campaign.

According to local sources such as Nuri Dersimi, the resistance of the Dersimis was fierce but the numbers cited in the military documents prove İnönü right and show that the losses of the Republic were minimal. In addition to the 13 casualties referred to by İnönü, until the end of the year the Republican army lost only 17 security personnel. Dersimis on the other hand, lost 262 people while more than 900 Dersimis surrendered themselves to the government. As for the demilitarization of Dersim, one of the most important objectives of the Republican agenda, the government was quite successful. During the first year of the campaign, 4,263 firearms were confiscated in Dersim. Additionally, the surrounding region of Dersim, namely the towns of Elazığ, Bingöl, Sivas and Malatya were also demilitarized. In these towns, a total of 8,626 firearms were confiscated. The government reports define these weapons as "arms gathered from the towns that are in relation with Dersim" but the nature of these relations was not cited in the reports. Regardless, the number of the confiscated arms

⁶⁵⁷ Ibid.

showed a considerable discrepancy between the previous estimates proposed by the government and the actual number of arms in the region.⁶⁵⁸

For the completion of the second objective, the removal of the tribal chieftains and *sayyids*, the government had to wait longer than they expected. The terrain in Dersim provided them opportunities to evade the military searches. Still, the armed forces tracked the tribal chieftains village by village to disarm them and expel them from Dersim along with their families. The military reports regarding this phase of the campaign supports the objectives of the reform programme. A report dating August 14, 1938 specifically separated the tribal chieftains from the Dersimis who joined the resistance “unwillingly, only after being threatened to join the rebellion” by the perpetrators. According to the report the armed forces would continue to pursue the chiefs while the “poor residents who were forcefully dragged to disobedience against the government” would be pardoned when they would voluntarily hand over their arms to the government. The number of the participants is given as “around 1,000” while the remaining resistance leaders were estimated around 65 men, except ten leaders who were captured alive and an unspecified number of men who were captured dead. This report also cites the name of the tribes that did not participate in the resistance which constitute the majority of the tribes in Dersim, and the names of the wanted tribal chieftains, including, perhaps not surprisingly Sayyid Rıza.⁶⁵⁹ According to the report, in addition to the 65 wanted men, around three hundred armed men fled to the forests, and to the caves in the mountains, in fear of their lives. The report made clear that the punishment of these will not be as severe as their leaders because these “poor and ignorant” Dersimis were dragged to this situation by their chiefs. According to the report the government asked the cooperation of all Dersimis to capture the wanted men. Helping to locate a resistance member would be rewarded while if this help would come from a fellow resistance member, his crimes would be pardoned. While being generous to the Dersimis who were “forced to join” to the resistance, the state forces were relentless against the leaders of the resistance. The villages and houses they left behind when they went to hiding were bombed or burned to the ground to

⁶⁵⁸ The estimates were varied between 18.000 and 25.000 firearms. For the actual numbers, see BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.751...30.

⁶⁵⁹ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...16.

prevent them from returning and to intimidate them.⁶⁶⁰ Eventually, the combination of the compassionate and relentless policies seemed to work in the favour of the government because the search for the wanted men ended in success. On September 11, 1937, Sayyid Rıza with his two men surrendered to the state forces in the nearby town of Erzincan. With his capture the initial phase of hostilities seemed to come to a conclusion.⁶⁶¹

On October 12, 1937, Rıza and other chieftains, 64 defendants in total, were put on trial in the neighbouring town of Elazığ, under article 149 of the Turkish Penal Code which charged them with “inciting and participating in a rebellion”. As the result of the extremely swift trials, nine defendants were acquitted of all crimes, thirty-eight were sentenced to various amounts of time in prison, and eleven men were sentenced to death.⁶⁶² Later, the death sentences of four men were changed to prison sentences because they were over the age-limit. Sayyid Rıza, his son and five other chieftains were executed on the night of 14 November, 1937. Two days later President Mustafa Kemal visited the region and opened the new infrastructure and constructions. These two successive events showed that the Republican regime managed to reach their objectives. A large part of Dersim was demilitarized, at least some chieftains were eliminated and the modernization project was still in motion which was symbolized by the opening of new buildings and construction projects by Atatürk. Yet, it turned out that this was not the end of the campaign, but only a temporary break due to the harsh winter conditions in Dersim.

The execution of the chiefs made the resistance linger until 1938. In January 1938, an attack on a military outpost by the remaining Dersimi militia ended with the death of nine soldiers. Furthermore, a decision taken on June 1, 1937 “to prevent future incidents of banditry for good” would incite further resistance in the region.⁶⁶³ This decision was the establishment of two forbidden zones within Dersim, to control the

⁶⁶⁰ Reşat Hallı, *Türkiye Cumhuriyetinde Ayaklanmalar (1924-1938)* (Ankara: Genelkurmay Basımevi, 1972), p. 400.

⁶⁶¹ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...20. There are different accounts regarding the capture of Sayyid Rıza. It is still unclear if Sayyid Rıza was surrendered in its own will to prevent more harm to Dersim, or got captured while he was trying to flee. The government reports state that he surrendered willingly and unconditionally, while the Kurdish Nationalist sources claim that he was captured by trickery or treason of other “Kurds”. For instance, according to Nuri Dersimi, Rıza was tricked by the Governor of Erzincan who promised him to that the demands of the tribe chieftains were accepted by the government. See Dersimi, *Kürdistan Tarihinde Dersim*, p. 288.

⁶⁶² BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...20.

⁶⁶³ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...20.

inaccessible parts of the region which were used by the wanted tribal members to escape from the searches of the armed forces. From July 1938 on, these regions would be depopulated entirely, regardless of the previous affiliation of the people who took refuge or resided in the forbidden zones. Another part of the plan showed that the nature of the military campaign of 1938 would be quite different from the campaign of the previous years. A further objective added to the “reform programme”; the people who would be driven out of the forbidden zone would not be relocated to other parts of Dersim, or would not return to the villages they had abandoned. They would be transferred to other parts of the country. In a report dated July 28, 1938, it was stated that the number of the people who would be sent away from Dersim was 7.000. This was a joint decision of the Inspector-General of the region, the Chief of General Staff and the new Prime Minister Celal Bayar. In addition to the creation of the forbidden zones, and the proposed forced relocation of thousands of Dersimis, the search for arms and armed men continued and the field of operations was enlarged to encompass all of Dersim.⁶⁶⁴ It was this phase of the campaign that would turn into mass murder.

It is still debatable what Bayar’s government tried to achieve by changing the objectives of the first campaign and targeting the entire region instead of focusing on finding the individuals who joined the resistance movement. It is evident from the archival documents that in 1938 new tribes joined the resistance such as the tribes of Kalan, Haydaran, Demanan, Sam Uşağı and Koç Uşağı which have been neutral or government-friendly during the campaign of 1937.⁶⁶⁵ It is presumed that the mutual distrust felt by the both sides led to the acceleration of the clashes. More and more tribes felt insecure due to further utilization of planes and bombing of the places associated by the government with the resistance, and the enlargement of the area of military operation, while the government started to perceive every Dersimi, in fact the very concept of Dersim with its traditions, social order, residents and geography, as an enemy. The military operation continued until September 1938. The forced relocation of the Dersimis, including tribal chieftains, *sayyids*, their families and residents of the areas associated with the resistance, followed the military operations.

⁶⁶⁴ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.748...1.

⁶⁶⁵ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.748...1.

The military campaign of 1938 had disastrous consequences. Unlike the 1937 campaign which had solely targeted the tribal leaders and *sayyids* who were perceived as the leaders of the resistance, the campaign of 1938 targeted the entire Dersimi population, and even the tribes who previously had made coalitions with the government suffered during this phase. Perhaps not surprisingly, mass killings of civilians were not reported in the official documents and the murdered Dersimis were defined as “bandits and their partners”. Here, the word “partners” can be deciphered as civilians who were related to the mentioned “bandits” either through family or tribal connections. Considering that the official death toll of 1938 was 13,160 Dersimis in comparison to 122 security personnel, while the government could only gather 844 firearms in that year, it shows that the majority, in fact almost the entirety, of the casualties were civilians.⁶⁶⁶ To better comprehend the scale of the killings, looking at the military report of a random day in Dersim is enough. For instance, the report dated August 19, 1938 stated that within a day, in the district of Sin alone 290 “bandits and their partners”, in Mazgirt 52 bandits “who tried to escape from the convoy of convicts after their capture”, in the village on Lolantanir 170 “bandits and their partners” who tried to escape from the search party, in 13 villages searched by the 15th Division of the army 152 “bandits and their partners” who resisted to the soldiers, and lastly, in three villages searched and burned to the ground by the 14th Division “69 people” were killed.⁶⁶⁷ In total, 733 Dersimis were killed within a day while on the other side, just two soldiers were slightly injured. The death tolls, the description of the events, and the inadequate number of weapons seized strongly suggest that these events were part of wide-scale massacres.

The methods of the massacres are hard to prove but stories about gathering people together and opening fire on them, burning them alive, killing the civilians who found refuge in the caves using chemical gas or poisonous carbon dioxide emanating from the fires which were lit in front of the caves, are common in the personal accounts. The issue of chemical gas is not well documented. Other methods such as burning people alive are so extreme that they are quite difficult to believe. Coming across countable oral history data is a hard task especially in this case in which eye-witnesses are very old and - naturally for Dersim - their stories tend to be interwoven

⁶⁶⁶ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.751...30.

⁶⁶⁷ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.750...4.

with various myths but in the last decade there has been an increase of non-biased oral history accounts. Nevertheless, the data gathered from these accounts and from the available official documents is insufficient to determine whether the mass killings were ordered by the government or the military in a hierarchical fashion or they were improvised by the local army forces to hasten the process of expulsion of Dersimis from the forbidden zones.

One recurring theme visible in the personal accounts stands out as a valuable information to understand the psychology of the soldiers who participated in the massacres. This theme is the deep-seated hatred that the Sunnis felt for the Alevi Dersimis. Various eyewitness accounts gathered by Dersimis, such as the “Dersim 1937-38 Oral History Project”, state that some soldiers were lectured by their officers on the religious persuasion of the Dersimis before the campaign. A soldier who participated the campaign told to the Project that he saw “Dersimis calling out for Ali to help them” which only motivated the soldiers to treat them more viciously while verbally abusing them as “dirty Kizilbash”.⁶⁶⁸ Another eye-witness who managed to escape the massacres while heavily injured stated that the soldiers who stabbed him over and over chanted “Allah, Allah!” which is traditionally used as battle cry of the Turkish Army while fighting against non-Muslims.⁶⁶⁹ It is reasonable to speculate that the officials exploited the anti-Alevism of the military personnel as an instrument to achieve the goal of depopulation of Dersim more quickly. The fact that no other anti-Alevi pogroms or massacres occurred during the early Republican era supports this assumption.

One of the factors that made the Dersim campaign so bloody was the “effective” utilization of modern weaponry. Although it was not the first time that bomber planes were used by Turkish armed forces, planes were more visible in this campaign than ever. The campaign was also used by the government to show the world how modernized the Turkish army was and how capable it would be in a future war, which was seen as imminent by all at that time. Considering that the period between 1935 and 1938 was an especially turbulent years in the world in which Italy attacked Abyssinia, Spain was in turmoil due to a bloody a civil war, and Germany violated

⁶⁶⁸ The personal accounts here are taken from the field research of the Dersim 1937-38 Oral History Project. Some Video interviews of the Oral History Project can be seen on their website (<http://www.dersim-tertele.com>).

⁶⁶⁹ Hüseyin Aygün, “Son Tanıklar Göçmeden....” *Bianet*, August 14, 2010.

several provisions of the Treaty of Versailles by introducing military conscription, rebuilding the armed forces, occupying the Rhineland, and annexing Austria with the *Anschluss*, one can only speculate if the Republican government used this “opportunity” to test its army’s capabilities, similarly to the Nazi Germany which tested the capability of the *Luftwaffe* during the Spanish Civil War, by bombing civilian targets in Spain, such as Guernica. Additionally, the Republic was pursuing a diplomatic war against France and Syria over the Sanjak issue. In 1936, France had recognised the independence of Syria including the disputed Sanjak region. Turkey intervened and the issue was taken to the League of Nations which bestowed on Sanjak the status of a distinct entity from Syria which would be dependent for its foreign relations to Syria, and would be independent domestically which created tension between Arab and Turkish nationalists in Sanjak, and between Syrian and Turkish governments. The summer of 1938, the period of the massacres of Dersim, coincided with the most hostile period of the Sanjak issue. On May 28, 1938, Atatürk travelled to the general headquarters of the Southern Army to make an appearance and inspected the army forces in Mersin and Adana, along the Syrian border. After this appearance 30,000 soldiers were allocated to the border region. In July 1938, the Turkish dominated government of Sanjak declared their independence and adopted a flag similar to the Turkish flag and the same laws as the Turkish Republic. The relentless approach of the government in Dersim, can also be read as a show of strength, determination and capability of the Turkish Army in the height of such an international crisis.

The Republican Modernization of Dersim: The Republicans’ Burden

During the military campaigns of 1937-1938, the Dersimi people were represented by the ruling elite and the media as habitual law-breakers. In the inaugural speech of the legislative year, Prime Minister Celal Bayar, who was reading Atatürk’s message⁶⁷⁰ defined the situation in Dersim not as a military campaign or a revolt but as “an act of mass banditry”.⁶⁷¹ “Bandit” was the most widely used tag for the Dersimi (“Tunceli

⁶⁷⁰ Atatürk’s health was deteriorating at that time and he would die a week later.

⁶⁷¹ Prime Minister Celal Bayar’s narration of President Atatürk’s speech at the Grand Assembly, November 1, 1938. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 27, pp. 3-4.

bandits are getting exterminated”⁶⁷²) followed by “marauders” (“The marauders are accounting before the courts”⁶⁷³) and “plunderers” (“The remnants of the plunderers are surrendering”⁶⁷⁴), while Sayyid Rıza was called as the “Bandit Chief”.⁶⁷⁵ Throughout the campaign party representatives approached this issue as a crusade for order and modernisation. Atatürk stated concerning the campaign that “there should be no obstacles left between our nation and the high civilization and welfare that it truly deserves” and thus implied that Dersim was an obstacle for reaching the ultimate goal of civilization.⁶⁷⁶ Similarly, İnönü described the campaign on Dersim as an action “which will make the region civilized.”⁶⁷⁷ The regime-friendly media followed suit. Yunus Nadi, a member of the parliament and the owner of the influential and pro-government newspaper *Cumhuriyet* depicted the campaign as “not a military campaign but a march of civilization” and defined the people of Dersim as the “mountain Bedouins”.⁶⁷⁸ Similarly *Kurun* newspaper described the campaign in Dersim a fundamental part of the Turkish revolution and stated that Turkey was establishing “culture and civilization” in the region.⁶⁷⁹ According to *Son Posta* this was a fight between the two spirits at the end of which the spirit of civilization and progress will predominate”.⁶⁸⁰

These examples show that the Republican modernism acted as if the local culture of Dersim was non-existent. For them, Dersim was not just materialistically underdeveloped but also deprived of its own culture, history and civilization. Similar to the colonialist approach, from the Republican perspective Dersim was seen as a place still in its natural form, devoid of any culture and civilization. These features could only be inserted to the region externally, by the forces of the Republic. By inspecting the official discourse of the government and its organic extension in the media, one can observe that an evident auto-orientalism and a crude colonialist approach were the main instruments of the regime during the period of military

⁶⁷² *Cumhuriyet*, June 22-23, 1937

⁶⁷³ *Tan*, June 22, 1937

⁶⁷⁴ *Tan*, June 29, 1937

⁶⁷⁵ *Kurun*, June 26, 1937

⁶⁷⁶ President Atatürk’s speech at the Grand Assembly, November 1, 1937. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 20, p. 3.

⁶⁷⁷ Prime Minister İsmet İnönü’s speech at the Grand Assembly, June 14, 1937. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre V, Cilt 19, p. 315.

⁶⁷⁸ Yunus Nadi, “Tunceli Vilayetimizin Islahı ve Medenileştirilmesi.” *Cumhuriyet*, June 17, 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁷⁹ *Kurun*, July 8, 1937

⁶⁸⁰ *Son Posta*, June 17, 1937

campaigns of 1937-1938. The ruling party and the media both declared that the resistance in Dersim which in reality emanated mainly from a strong sense of panic due to the government's agenda of eradicating the ancient social order and cultural institutions, was shown to be nothing but a rebellion by the "archaic forces of the past" against the "modern forces" represented by the Republic. As the reports from August 1938 show, the Republican forces claimed that they acted on behalf of the "poor, uneducated, ignorant people" of Dersim who were unable to know right from wrong.⁶⁸¹

From the official point of view, the single-party insisted that to develop modernity from this archaic system, a fresh start was needed and this objective could only be achieved through drastic measures. Therefore, most of Dersim was levelled to the ground, as an act of "creative destruction" in order to build it again from scratch and to bring civilization to the region through pacifying the perceived "barbarians". Numerous examples supporting the legitimacy of this claim are visible both in the media and the deeds of the government. The physical appearance, clothing, belief system and life-style of the Dersimi people were reviewed daily in newspapers during the military campaign, mostly in a condescending tone. Their "savage, primitive living conditions in their caves"⁶⁸² are a crucial part of the Republican imagination of Dersim. According to *Tan* newspaper, the modern machinery used by the Republican Army dumbfounded the residents of Dersim. The newspaper stated there were voluminous reports on how "the ignorant and primitive people of Dersim" were shouting "the Birds of Kemal (Atatürk) are coming!" and fleeing upon seeing the approaching Turkish bombers.⁶⁸³ Following details in the article on how Kamer Agha, one of the most respected chieftains of Dersim, had not even seen a motorized vehicle in his life before his arrival to Elazığ after his capture further serves the depiction of the Dersimi people in miserable condition, in a ridiculous naivety, opposed to the technological prowess of the Republic.

Despite the resistance of the locals, the Republican regime was depicted as merciful and forgiving to these people "who were at each other's throats before" the military campaign.⁶⁸⁴ According to *Ulus*, the young Republic was trying to "insert all

⁶⁸¹ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...16.

⁶⁸² *Kurun*, June 19, 1937.

⁶⁸³ Ahmet Emin Yalman, "Kemal Kuşları Geliyor!" *Tan*, June 22, 1937, p. 1.

⁶⁸⁴ *Son Telgraf*, June 28, 1937.

of the elements of a civilized life-style to the region through the instrumentality of culture and technique from the start of the year 1936".⁶⁸⁵ Another newspaper article stated "although this type of under-developed regions exists even in the most developed countries, this was unacceptable for the Republic".⁶⁸⁶ According to the politicians and newspapers, victory was inevitable, the regime would "eradicate all historical evil" and "through the military order this region of savages will at the end become the Switzerland of Turkey".⁶⁸⁷ Interior Minister Şükrü Kaya's circular dated August 26, 1937 similarly stated that the programme of the government was "to make Republican laws master of the region through the construction of roads, bridges, schools, outposts and barracks, to capture the bandits and to make these poor, ignorant and uncouth men benefit from the climate of order, welfare and civilization provided by the Republic".⁶⁸⁸

As if to open up a clean slate, a *tabula rasa*, immediately after the destruction a massive rebuilding campaign was started. Both Atatürk and İnönü opened new structures such as bridges when they visited the region to further accentuate that this campaign was a creative campaign which was aiming to erase the past. Falih Rıfkı Atay, wrote in *Ülkü* that the campaign was aiming "not to confiscate some bandits but to remove all of the foundations of banditry through building schools and roads for the Dersimi people". For him this was not a colonializing attempt but on the contrary it was a liberating one, "a fight for freedom".⁶⁸⁹ *Ulus* reported that in the summer of 1937, "new roads, and bridges were built, swamps were drained to reduce the threat of diseases"⁶⁹⁰ in Dersim, as a part of the modernization project which the newspaper titled as the "Major Rebuilding Programme". In these newspaper reports the construction of roads and bridges were especially celebrated because they would connect a previously unreachable land to modern Turkey thus acting as symbolic passages to civilization. Another example of the fascination with the rebuilding project is evident in the same *Ulus* article which claims that for the first the time in the history of Dersim, "radio, telephone, saw and hammer noises are heard in the region instead of firearm noises". The article ends with an obvious colonialist comment: "Now,

⁶⁸⁵ *Ulus*, June 22, 1937.

⁶⁸⁶ Kemal Unal, "Tuncelide Islahat." *Ulus*, June 22, 1937, pp. 3-4.

⁶⁸⁷ Niyazi Ahmet, "Vahşi İnsanların Ülkesi." *Kurun*, July 8, 1937, pp. 1-2.

⁶⁸⁸ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.743...18.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ülkü*, June 21, 1937.

⁶⁹⁰ *Ulus*, June 26, 1937.

Dersim is ours as much as Ankara”.⁶⁹¹ Indeed, we can see examples of perceiving Dersim as a new colony, a newly-acquired land that raised a spirit of colonial excitement in Turkey. An article which ‘with colonial joy’ announced that the “Scientists found precious mines in the region!” neatly represents this mind-set.⁶⁹² Interestingly, this colonial attitude is recognised and supported by some sections of the international community as well. An article written in a British periodical ‘Truth’ which was close to the Conservative Party, warmly saluted the deeds of the Turkish regime in Dersim with fraternity and claimed that the “British nation which is very experienced when it comes to deal with uncivilized tribes around the world perfectly understands the situation of the modern Turkish government”.⁶⁹³

These examples and many more show that the Republic and the state-controlled media acted as if the Dersimi identity, with all of its different components; the semi-autonomous political existence, Kurdish/Zaza or Dersimi ethnicity, Dimili language, Alevi religion, and tribal social order, did not matter or even more maliciously did not exist at all. They became objects in the eyes of the Republic which could be easily destroyed for their difference and diversity. Another example of the objectification of the Dersimis is evident regarding the fate of the expelled. Dersimis who were forced to relocate to other regions of Turkey were dehumanized and reduced to the situation of being mere commodities. They were dealt as “things” without personal integrity. According to a report from July 1938, the number of the Dersimis who would be relocated was determined initially as 2,000, and later this number was raised to 7,000. As a circular of the Prime Minister Celal Bayar from July 1938 shows us, the government planned to relocate 1,500 of these Dersimis specifically to the industrialized Western region of Turkey as a remedy to the acute labourer shortage of the Western region. Large factories and production facilities, such as the paper factory in İzmit, or the Iron-Steel Works of Karabük, and the coal mines of Zonguldak were identified as some of the institutions which could benefit from the Dersimi workforce.⁶⁹⁴ Later this plan was sent to the ministries of Defence, Interior, Finance, Economy, and Health, as well as to the General Staff to hear their opinion on this matter. The response of the Ministry of the Interior to this demand is especially

⁶⁹¹ *Ulus*, July 5, 1937.

⁶⁹² *Tan*, June 25, 1937.

⁶⁹³ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.745...11.

⁶⁹⁴ BCA: 30...10.0.0/ 111.748...1.

striking. The ministry claimed that Dersimi people were not suitable to work efficiently in modern conditions and would definitely constitute a source of “constant sorrow, expense, and concern”. The report continued that at most, a limited number of them should be employed in these environments to “test their talents”. Despite this opposition, the government decided to deport 7,000 Dersimis and locate 3,100 of them in the industrialized Western regions to solve the labour shortage problem.

It is quite difficult to determine whether or not this plan, which eerily sounds like the practices of the colonial empires, was ever put in motion. It is evident from the documents that a large number of Dersimis were deported from the forbidden zone but the question of whether they were employed in these industrial enterprises is left open to interpretation. On the other hand, giving a healthy estimation of the total number of deportees is quite possible due to a presidential decree signed by İsmet İnönü on June 3, 1939 which shows that the government underestimated the number of the deported Dersimis in 1938. In fact, the number of the deportees was raised to at least 14,000 at the time of the mentioned decree.⁶⁹⁵ The numbers of a recent enquiry corresponds with this number. On February 17, 2012, as a sub-division of the Petition Committee of the Grand Assembly, a sub-committee named “Relief for the Sufferings Caused by the Dersim Incidents of 1937-1938 and its Aftermath” was established. The sub-committee asked the Republican Archives of the Prime Ministry to share the documents regarding the fate of the Dersimi refugees. These documents were not open to investigation before the request of the sub-committee. On April 29, 2012, the sub-committee announced that in total 14,111 Dersimis were deported from the region to 32 different cities, which tallies with the numbers given in İnönü’s decree. From the western cities mentioned in the plan of employing the Dersimi workers in the industrial enterprises, only Isparta and Muğla received a large number of Dersimis.⁶⁹⁶

These acts of the government show that by destroying the Dersimi identity in a humiliating way and treating Dersim as an internal colony, several aspects of their political agenda was fulfilled. This was an attempt to melt another identity, similar to the other religious, ethnic, gender-based, or ideological identities, within the modern Turkish identity. Furthermore, the regime felt the supremacy derived from “play-acting” as a colonial power for a while. For once, Turkey could act as a modern power

⁶⁹⁵ BCA: 30...18.1.2/ 87.51...6.

⁶⁹⁶ “İşte Dersim Sürgün Listesi.” *Milliyet*, April 30, 2012.

with its own “white man’s burden”. According to Chakrabaty, for the orientalist Western observers the Indian history existed only in transition between despotic and constitutional, medieval and modern, feudal and capitalist. Within this narrative, the Indian was always a figure of lack, inadequate and bound to failure.⁶⁹⁷ Dersim and Dersimis were perceived similarly by the Republicans. Dersim was a colony, a place which existed in transition on which the Republic can show off its progress and impose its modernity on its residents.

An effective example supporting the presence of this Republican approach was a public exhibition held in the Ankara Police Institute Museum after the arrest of Sayyid Rıza who was described by the newspapers as a “trickster” who had deceived and exploited the Dersimi people. While Sayyid Rıza was still in Elazığ, waiting for the conclusion of his trial, his personal belongings, including some items he used in religious, spiritual rituals, including “supposedly holy trinkets, enchantments, Christian crosses and blankets with magical powers, a crown with supernatural abilities and a cut finger that allegedly belong to Jesus Christ”⁶⁹⁸ were displayed in this exhibition. This display strongly resembles the numerous colonial exhibitions held in Western Europe in the last half of the 19th century during the peak of the colonial empires. Whether this exhibit was held to ridicule the eclectic belief system of the Dersimi tribes or to satisfy the curiosity felt by people of Ankara towards the exotic new-found-lands of the east, it perfectly demonstrates the auto-orientalist and colonialist attitude of the regime. For the modern Republic, Dersim was dealt with as a mysterious place whose non-modernity should be frowned upon.

Their entire social order and cultural inheritance which managed to survive for centuries were first shown as a source of problems, then was ridiculed and eventually destroyed by the Republic “for the sake of Dersimis”. A year after the military campaign of 1938, the Minister of the Interior Faik Öztrak spoke in the Parliament to renew the Tunceli Law until 1942, and proudly presented the facts that supported the Republican discourse of modernization. The regime managed to build nine military barracks, five government offices, six military outposts, eight schools, and twelve bridges, in addition to roads and housing for the public servants and officers stationed

⁶⁹⁷ Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for “Indian” Pasts?” *Representations*, No. 37 (Winter, 1992), pp. 5-6.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ulus*, November 7, 1937.

in the region.⁶⁹⁹ While giving this information Öztrak failed to mention the 13,806 dead Dersimis, and more than 14,000 deported people who were forced to live far away from their homeland. Furthermore, Öztrak spoke too soon to proclaim victory for the Republic. With the emergence of the Second World War and the economic problems ensuing from it, the development of the region stopped. If we observe what happened to Dersim after this brief period of modernist passion, we can clearly see that the authoritarian government was miles away from accomplishing its ultimate goal of creating a modern society in Dersim from scratch. The archival documents which follow the events of 1938 show that Dersim was reduced to a public order problem. Documents reveal that Dersimi people continued to harass the neighbouring villages and steal their livestock. This time local gendarmerie forces dealt with these incursions. Dozens of these incidents were reported which proves two certainties. First, life always goes on despite all the chaos, and secondly the target which was set by the republic on creating a new Dersim did not come true at all. The cold reality greatly differed from that colonialist passion aimed at creating a Switzerland out of Dersim.

An Assessment of the Turkish Modernization

This chapter examined the single-party years of the Turkish Republic through the lens of modernization. Here I have used the Republican reform project as a heuristic device to learn more in-depth about the authoritarian tendencies of the regime. I specifically examined how the Republican modernization project aimed at total Westernization instead of adopting only Western technology and tried to generate social change in Turkey through reducing the importance and visibility of Islam and the traditions, institutions, and regulations emanating from the Islamicate culture of Turkey. Among the various reforms implemented in the fields of law, culture, education and women's rights, leaving the Islamicate world and joining Western civilization was perceived as the main objective. The reform process was not without its successes, the secularisation of the legal order, the expansion of the rights of women, the increase in the availability of formal education, and the increased rate of literacy could all be

⁶⁹⁹ Minister of the Interior Faik Öztrak's speech at the Grand Assembly. See *T.B.M.M. Zabıt Ceridesi*. Devre VI, Cilt 4, p. 176.

regarded as improvements. Yet, its implementation was authoritarian and geared toward the uniformization of the multiple identities of post-Ottoman Turkey.

Republican ideology was centred around the concept of modernization as well as on the intolerance shown towards other identities other than the national, modern, secular Turkish identity that had been carefully structured by the Republican elite starting with the establishment of single-party rule in 1925. The modernization programme was one of the key instruments of this process. Following the examples of reformist attitude of *Tanzimat*, *Hamidian* and Second Constitutional eras, but simultaneously drastically differentiating from them by targeting to reduce the visibility and significance of religion, religious institutions, and the traditions emanating from these, the Republican reform programme aimed to create lasting change in the new Turkish society. To achieve this it established an authoritarian, semi-fascist single-party rule in the political sphere and in the ideological sphere, the regime encircled the society through the instrumentality of a political religion based on the personality cults of the party leaders and the sacralisation of the secular entities such as the state, nationhood, and the ruling party. Republican modernization completed these elements explained in detail in the previous chapters, in the cultural, educational and social spheres.

As stated above, in Republican modernization, the reforms were implemented as state projects while the contribution of the masses were kept to a minimum. Even in the women's rights issue, where an independent, organic feminist movement existed, the state proposed and implemented its own programme without allowing this movement to continue to exist and thrive. The attitude of the modernization project towards cultural, political, and social reflections of the Islamic past of Turkey, and the sources of differences in the society was hostile. The project targeted a civilizational shift, a transition from the Eastern, Islamicate or Oriental culture, to Western and modern civilization. This approach only accepted absolutes, there was no grey zone between these two polar opposites. The acceptance of the Western civilization could only be achieved with the rejection of the Eastern one. Therefore for the creation of the new, national, modern, secular identity dreamed of by the Republican elite, traditions such as the Arabo-Persian alphabet, institutions such as Sufi religious orders, religious, linguistic, class-based, gender-related and ethnic identities, had to be rejected as well.

Dersim was a crystallization of this total rejection, therefore studying it is a valuable tool to better comprehend the nature of Turkish authoritarianism. Dersim was seen by the Republican elite as a backward entity which was established from various backward components such as Dersimi culture, Kurdish (or Zaza or Dersimi) ethnicity, Dimili language, and Dersimi Alevi religion. Additionally, the social order of Dersim was problematic for the Republican perception of modernity. The residents of Dersim felt a connection to their kin, their tribes, their tribal leaders and religious figures such as *Sayyids*. Furthermore, there was poverty in the region which created a security problem for its surrounding regions. For the Republican regime, Dersim became the embodiment of every social, cultural and political illness that should be purged from the country. From that point on, the Republic presented Dersimi people only two options. They would either renounce their own identity and embrace the new, modern, secular, Turkish identity or be eliminated. According to the official documents 13,806 Dersim residents were killed in the operations. In addition, more than 14,000 of them were deported from Dersim. Considering the estimated population of Dersim was around 65,000 before the campaigns, in 1939 the number of Dersimi residents was almost reduced to half. Although it was presented as a bloody revolt by the Kurdish and Turkish nationalists, only a small minority within Dersim resisted. The majority of the tribes did not participate in the resistance. Yet, almost the entire population of Dersim suffered from the military campaigns. This was the most momentous and significant humanitarian disaster in the history of the Turkish Republic.

Chapter 5

Conclusion

There is a monster in the world. A monster called the state which is in the process of devouring the society.

- Carlo Roselli, 1934

In 1934, upon inspecting the destruction unleashed on the European continent by authoritarian regimes, Italian dissident Carlo Roselli noted that, there was monster in the world, “a monster called the state, which is in the process of devouring the society”.⁷⁰⁰ This remark perfectly encapsulates the very soul of the Republican policies and ideology which I tried to explain in this study by examining it through three different, yet interrelated lenses. The Republican regime’s main ideological trait was a strong drive for modernization. Members of the Republican elite, including Atatürk himself, came to the conclusion upon inspecting the collapse of the Ottoman Empire that Turkey should be a modern, nation state which was firmly integrated to the Western civilization. To perform this civilization leap, Turkey should sever all of its ties with its past, the Islamicate culture which was associated by the regime with backwardness. To achieve this feat, the regime promoted the establishment of an ‘ideal community’; a monolithic, national bloc of people without any political, social and cultural division between them. As depicted in the previous chapters, the Republican regime used a combination of assimilationist and exclusionary policies to destroy every sense of belonging, every identity either secular such as class-based, gender-based, linguistic and ethnic, or religious, and melt them into a national singularity. As Roselli stated, the Republican regime devoured the post-Ottoman society of Anatolia and created a modern, Turkish one out of it.

⁷⁰⁰ Petersen, p. 11.

This study argues that the Republican regime was extremely aggressive and uncompromising about the decision of modernizing at all costs; because the members of the ruling elite witnessed to scenes of immense suffering during the last days of the Ottoman Empire. Some of them lost their homelands, and families in the wars, most of them were forced to live their lives away from their birthplaces.⁷⁰¹ Additionally, they all witnessed to the near destruction of the sovereignty of the Ottoman subjects during the First World War, as well. Furthermore, as the parliamentary speech of deputy Atalay which mentioned the sufferings of the Muslims of Sudan, Morocco and Central Asia suggests, they were also following the colonial subjugation of their fellow Muslims. In addition to these elements, the zeitgeist of the inter-war era made the adherents of many ideologies to believe that their communities were living through a special time period, which would determine the ultimate fate of their people. A combination of these traumatic experiences and the belief in the transitional nature of their times, shaped the Republican mind-set. As Mustafa Kemal's quote on the futility of "resistance to the storming impulse of the civilization" clearly depicts, the Republican regime perceived the 'civilizational leap' from the Ottoman past, to a Western future as a matter of life-and-death. This perception further radicalized the Republican policies. In accordance to the zeitgeist, they decided to take drastic measures to create an easily controllable, ideal, national community, and carry this society from its Islamicate past to a Western feature. This study was an evaluation of these policies.

The first chapter of the thesis, summarized both the history and historiography of the single-party years and showed that there was no democratic intent in the single-party rule, and that it was not a transitional period between a monarchy and multi-party democracy. All reforms performed by the Republican regime which weakened authoritarianism and were presented to the public opinion as genuine attempts to adopt democracy came to life after 1945, after the utter defeat of authoritarianism in Europe during the Second World War, chiefly to establish friendly relations with the Allied

⁷⁰¹ Zürcher, in his short yet brilliant study of the birthplaces and identities of the prominent members of the Young Turk movement, comes to the conclusion that the emergence of the movement was directly related to the birthplaces and childhood memories of its members. An overwhelming majority of the members of the movement were born and raised in territories which were recently lost or in danger or foreign occupation. Therefore Zürcher calls the Young Turks as the "children of the borderlands". A similar definition can be made for the early Republican elite. See Erik-Jan Zürcher, "The Young Turks – Children of the borderlands?" *International Journal of Turkish Studies*. Vol. 9, Issue 1-2 (2003), pp. 275-286.

powers. Single-party regime of Turkey was a definite authoritarian regime with an extremely limited pluralism and its actions were legitimized by the perceived importance of its mission of modernization. Its complete rejection of the Islamicate past separated it from the previous Young Turk regimes while reading it as a traditional conservative authoritarianism like the Spanish, Greek and Portuguese examples or assuming that it had an anti-imperialist, anti-colonial character are historically inaccurate. The republican regime aimed to destroy the traditional sources of authority such as the sultanate or the Sufi religious orders unlike other Mediterranean dictatorships that embraces the royal and religious sources of authority. As for its anti-imperialist colouring, that element remained as a part of the regime for a short while, starting from mid 1920s the regime joined to the international liberal camp and as the colonial nature of the Dersim massacres and the glorification of the Western civilization show, it never imagined itself anywhere except the Western world. Therefore the Republican regime was a definite authoritarian regime which shared many similarities with the numerous fascist and totalitarian regimes of the inter-war era.

The second chapter focusing on fascism displayed the fascist tendencies of the regime. In this study, fascism is defined as an authoritarian, revolutionary, and ultra-nationalist movement or regime, whose policies are based on the elimination of the internal and external enemies of the nation to revive it, and reclaim its past glories. This chapter pointed out that the Turkish authoritarianism targeted a total transformation of the society to create an ideal national community. It was revolutionary, and ultra-nationalist. Although it pursued a peaceful foreign policy and did not employ an expansionist, militarist language like major Fascist regimes of Europe, the regime still depicted elements of fascism, especially regarding the exclusionary policies they implemented on the non-Muslim minorities. Fascist tendencies of the regime emerged out of the type of the community they envisaged. Their ideal community was a cohesive, monolithic bloc undivided by class-struggle, religious and denominational differences, different lifestyle choices, diverse linguistic and ethnic identities, and ideological currents. There was not much room for plurality of any kind in the society conceived by the Republican elite. Therefore every single form of dissidence and plurality had to be purged from the society. As shown in the first chapter starting from 1925, the entire political sphere was cleansed from

opposition. Similarly with the closure of social organizations such as Turkish Hearths and Sufi religious orders, the social sphere was cleansed. With the reforms on education, language, and with the policies of assimilation, the cultural sphere was purged from plurality and all cultural, ethnic and linguistic identities were tried to be melted in a monolithic Turkish identity. Therefore although the regime did not use the same aggressive, militant language with some of its European counterparts, and did not plan of resurrecting a lost empire through territorial expansion, it still carried fascist undertones.

For the total civilizational transformation planned by the regime, the Republican elite needed total control over society. As the third chapter displayed, to fill the vacuum emerged in the political, social and even the religious spheres, and to maintain complete ideological control over the society, a political religion based on the sanctity of the ruling party, its ideology and its leaders was carefully established during the single-party era. Republican political religion aimed to replace the place of all other secular ideologies in Turkey and it perceived the religion as a formidable opponent in the race of controlling the society. Therefore Republican regime was not a tolerant civil religion, on the contrary, it was a textbook political religion. In fact, since elements of this religion are still visible in the Turkish society, one might argue that the Republican political religion was one of the most complete, and successful processes of sacralisation of the politics.

As the last chapter displayed, the destruction of Dersim was a culmination of these radical policies. Instead of leaving it as a mere footnote in the history of the single-party era, or categorizing it as “another Kurdish revolt”, this study tried to interpret the massacres in Dersim as a central event in the Republican history. Dersim is central because it is the crystallization of the Republican total rejection of the social, cultural, and political diversity in Turkey. The massacres in Dersim depicted the most extreme, most brutal face of the Turkish authoritarianism. Due to their tribal connections, perceived backwardness, the language they used, their ethnic background, religious affiliation and diverse culture, the people of Dersim represented the embodiment of every type of social ill that the regime fought against. Therefore the regime decided to eliminate them as they eliminated the political opposition, social organizations, and cultural diversity in the country. According to the official numbers, almost half of the population of the region was either killed or relocated in other parts

of the country. This almost annihilation of the Dersimi identity in 1938 showed how determinate and unyielding the Republican government was in their project of transformation of the society according to their ideology. Although the Republican regime had many impressive achievements, such as the peaceful foreign policy, industrialization, secularization, developments regarding the women' rights, increase in the availability of education, and many more, this destructive side should not be forgotten when defining the nature of this unique regime.

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